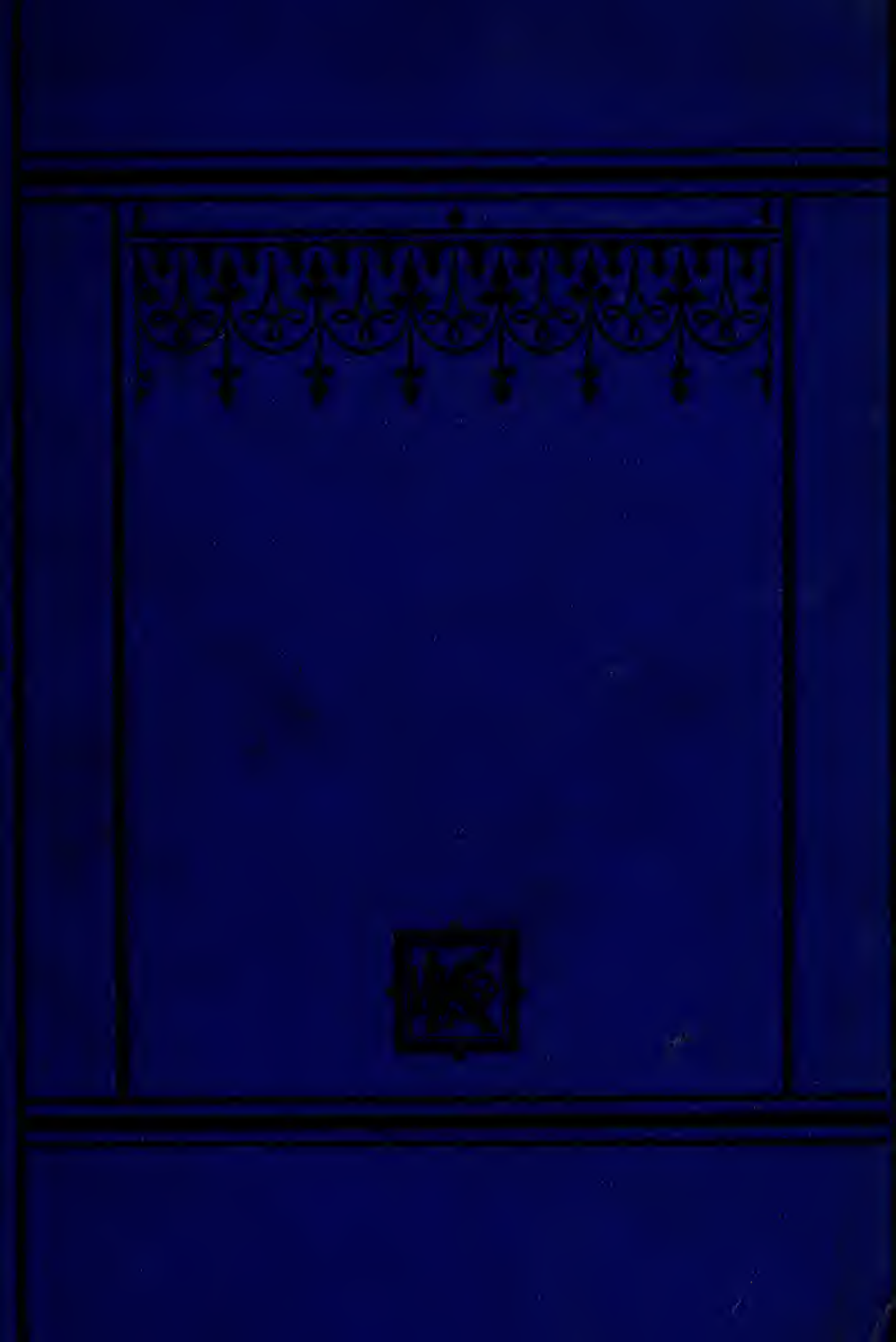

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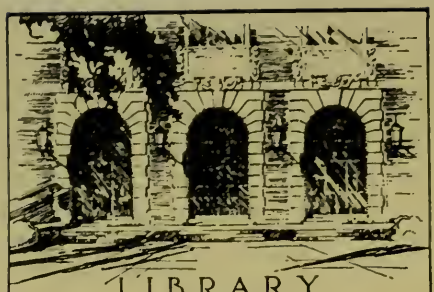

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WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE

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WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE

By A. M. Donelan

AUTHOR OF 'FLORA ADAIR'
ETC.

'Good shepherd, tell this youth what 't is to love'

Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, v. 2

Vol. II.

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'WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE.'

CHAPTER I.

She was the hope that whispered of to-morrow,
She was the memorial music of the past.—L. E. L.

ALFRED had spoken truly when he said that his recent mourning had been the motive of his declining Lord Waters' invitation to Maurpton Castle during the autumn, but added to this was a shrinking from seeing Maud for the first time after an absence of nearly five years, in the midst of gay company, and in the home which he could not picture for himself without his kind fatherly old friend, the late Lord Waters.

The sudden change in his own position had removed every material barrier between him and Maud, and with the consciousness that they were no longer necessarily separated came the reaction from the long restraint which he had set upon his heart and memory. Yet the more he thought of her, the more he disliked the idea of meeting her among strangers, and he had resolved to wait until she came with her brother to London in the spring, when he would choose his own time for the desired yet half-dreaded meeting. It was arranged otherwise, and better than he could have done it for himself; they did meet among strangers, yet the moment afterwards they were virtually alone—alone in a crowd, and spared any feeling of shyness which there might have been had they been really alone.

Alfred had never liked politics, but he felt especially grateful to them on that evening, when they held Mr. Haggerston and Lord Waters in a close conversation on Maud's right hand, whilst he slipped into the chair on her left and enjoyed a tête-à-tête under cover of her brother's presence. And Maud also found it very pleasant to sit there listening to an account of all that had so strangely come to pass in the life of her old playmate during the few years which had changed her from a precocious child to a much-admired beauty, and discovering how great an influence the remembrance of her had exercised over all his feelings and actions.

In speaking of his unexpected inheritance also, he unconsciously betrayed that, had it not brought him nearer to her he would have

preferred not to have been the cause of his cousin's disappointment in losing what he certainly had been permitted to expect. This was the sweetest of flattery to Maud—to feel herself the ruling thought of another's life, and especially of one who had won the world's applause. She forgot for the time that he was not learned and that she professed to value only the distinction of literary talent.

Alfred needed no excuse to ride over and see his old friends every day, and thus he managed to be constantly at Maud's side during the ensuing week, which they spent in the same neighbourhood. After their accidental meeting he felt no more power to keep away from her than one would to keep water from spreading over the ice after it has been once broken; moreover, his jealousy was excited by Lord Moyston, who seemed

determined to carry off the prize, although his suit was evidently more favoured by Lord Waters than by his sister.

By her father's will, if Lady Maud married before she came of age, without her brother's consent, she forfeited all right to her fortune. The late Lord Waters had done this in order to place some restraint—at least until she was old enough to make a wise selection for herself—on the wayward will of his spoiled darling when he could no longer guide and guard her, and he believed that this restriction would weigh with her, since she was too proud ever to entertain the thought of entering a strange family as a portionless bride. Alfred knew nothing of this condition, but when, on the day before their departure for Ireland, Lord Waters invited him again to visit him, he thought it only fair to tell him

that, if he accepted the invitation it would be as Maud's betrothed, or at least with this hope before him.

Lord Waters had not been blind to what had been passing, and had given the invitation as much in the hope of eliciting such a declaration as from the feeling that their old friendship required it of him, unless he could find some cause for avoiding a renewal of their intimacy.

'I cannot press you to come, Alfred,' replied Lord Waters, 'for I consider Maud almost engaged to Moyston; indeed, as far as my influence extends, I have promised her to him, and shall take it ill of you if, after having heard this from me, you seek to interfere with him. He is, as you know, my greatest friend, one to whom I am under real obligations, and Maud gave him very fair

encouragement until within the last few days: she shall therefore marry him, or incur my grave displeasure.'

'Come, Dick, this is a little arbitrary. Maud must have the first voice in the matter, and I shall appeal to her to know whether she has ever given Moyston a right to consider her bound to him in any way. I would not try to make her throw over anyone, unless I saw that she had been persuaded to accept him without really caring for him; but as long as she is free I will not let Moyston or anyone else win her without a hard struggle. Who has so good a right to her heart as I have? Have I not loved her from my childhood, and, even when I believed I should never see her again, was she not the ideal to which I compared every other woman, and found none to equal her?

Why do you object to me as an aspirant for her hand?'

'Because I do not think you suited to each other, and because you are of different religions. It is not, however, from objecting to you individually that I refuse her to you, so much as from her having encouraged Moyston, and I am resolved that she shall marry him.'

'And I am resolved that she shall not, if she prefers me—and I believe she does prefer me!' replied Alfred becoming somewhat excited.

Lord Waters' countenance darkened: he was under obligations to Lord Moyston, and, counting too much upon his own influence and power over his sister, he had assured him she would accept him if he would show a little patience, and give her time to get tired of mere flirtations. They fancied, moreover,

that their hopes were about to be crowned with success, during that Christmas-time, as she had been very gracious to Lord Moyston, since their arrival at the Abbey, until Alfred appeared ; but from that moment there was a marked change in her manner, and on that very morning Lord Waters had been irritated by his friend's reproaches, to the effect that he had caused him to lose Maud by having hindered him from urging her to engage herself whilst the field was still clear, at least from any favoured rival.

'Listen Meredith,' Lord Waters said, after a long pause, during which Alfred stood looking at him with an expression of settled determination : 'my honour is engaged to Lord Moyston in this matter, and I shall consider it a personal injury if you attempt to persuade Maud to oppose my wishes.

Promise me not to speak to her on this subject, and even to avoid meeting her for the next six months; by that time if she has not had the good feeling and sense to accept Lord Moyston, according to the wishes of the family, and as she herself encouraged us to expect, I shall acknowledge your right to win her if you can.'

'Come, my Lord, I declare that this is too absurd—and from an Irishman! You ask a man to avoid a woman he loves for six months, in order to leave the field free for another? Were there any reasonable objection to me as a suitor for your sister, nothing on earth would induce me to urge her to accept me against the approbation of her family, but since there is none, I candidly tell you that I am resolved to have an answer direct from herself on the very first oppor-

tunity, and the more so because, as even you must admit, she does not show any desire to avoid my attentions.'

'Then it remains for me to shield her as far as I can from the consequences of her own caprices. A week ago no one would have said that she repulsed Lord Moyston. Common gratitude for all my poor father's kindness, would, I should have thought, have prompted a little more consideration on your part. I did not think you would so soon have forgotten ——'

'Oh Dick, you know I never could forget your father, or his kindness to me,' interrupted Alfred hastily, 'or fail in any consideration towards you. I cannot, however, sacrifice my own chance of happiness, and perhaps Maud's, because you have set your heart upon making an ambitious marriage for

her. But there is nothing else in the world that I would not do.'

'Of course it is always the particular thing you ask of your friend that he finds it utterly impossible to do!' replied Lord Waters, coldly. 'Remember, however, and I give you fair warning, I shall put every obstacle I can between you and Maud, and I repeat that it is more than ungenerous of you to try to make her act in a manner that everyone must condemn, since, uninfluenced by what I must call an appeal to her imagination, she would never think of so acting.'

Lord Waters turned away abruptly, leaving Alfred in a most unpleasant state of mind. Was it true that Maud had given Lord Moyston a right to consider her as almost engaged to him; and was her brother justified in speaking of it as he had

done? Alfred hesitated. Should he find some excuse for avoiding the riding-party and allow Maud to return home without telling her distinctly that which he had spent the last week in endeavouring to impress upon her—that he loved her, and that without her his unexpected fortune would become hateful to him, since it had awakened the hope of happiness which he had schooled himself to believe impossible, only to cause him the pain of losing it? He still lingered irresolute at the window where Lord Waters had left him when the sound of voices in the adjoining smoking-room caught his ear, and looking through the open door he saw Lord Waters and Mr. Haggerston.

'I am guardian to my sister, as you know, said Lord Waters in a louder tone than that in which he had been previously speaking, as

if he wished to be overheard; 'my father thought it so necessary to place some restraint upon her, at least until she was of age, that by his will her fortune is forfeited if she marries without my consent before that time.'

'And Waters thinks that such a reason will render me more willing to defer to his wishes?' thought Alfred with an angry flush, and leaving the billiard-room. 'He shall see!'

He went round to the stables to see that his horse was ready, and there he learned that an order had just been given to saddle a horse for Lord Waters. Without making any observation he turned away, but it was evident that the intelligence surprised or displeased him. In the hall he found young Mrs. Haggerston, Maud, and Miss Hilton already equipped for the ride.

'Only imagine, Dick is coming with us after all!' said Maud, as Alfred approached them; 'yet before luncheon he declared that because he had so many letters to write it was impossible for him to go out. Miss Hilton must have bewitched him into forgetting even parliamentary affairs.'

'Or he may, on reflection, have thought it necessary to come and guard his fair sister,' said Alfred, looking towards the place where Lord Waters stood talking to Mrs. Haggerston's husband. 'But here come the horses.'

CHAPTER II.

With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,
For stony limits cannot hold love out.—SHAKESPEARE.

As they started Maud led the way with her two rival admirers. The thought that Lord Waters had come in order that if by chance Lord Moyston should be separated from Maud he might replace him, so irritated Alfred that he would have given worlds to be able to outwit them and get Maud away, yet even in his excited state of mind he felt that it was next to impossible to do this without outraging ordinary politeness. The park was of immense extent, and before they reached the

end of the avenue Lord Waters called to the leaders to stop for a moment.

'Mrs. Haggerston would like a canter at once,' said Lord Waters, overtaking them, 'as she finds it cold. If you cross the grass to the right we shall have a good stretch through the fields and can get to the road by the Tower Wood; the gate is never locked, she says, until evening.'

The wood was so called because upon an eminence in its centre there stood a high tower which was supposed to have been in olden times both a watch-tower and the dwelling-place of a guardian for the lake which supplied the Abbey with fish; and which, even in the present time, was richly stocked with trout. The wood was celebrated for the profusion of its evergreens and flowering shrubs, which rendered it very pretty in

winter-time; yet, as the path which ran through it would only admit, at most, of two to ride abreast, Alfred thought it a strange route to choose for a large party of equestrians, and at once settled in his own mind that it was the design of Lord Waters to separate him from Maud.

The horse he rode was one which Mr. Hilton wished to sell, and Alfred was riding it on trial, having offered to purchase it if it suited him. It was a high-mettled animal, and, as if sympathising with its rider's impatience of conventional restraint, no sooner felt the soft sward than it started into a quick gallop, thereby exciting its two fellows to try their speed also. Accordingly, the trio reached the entrance to the Tower Wood before the others had even come in sight of it.

There was a spring-lock to the gate, but in

the day-time it was fastened back by a hook, and a light latch only secured the gate. Lord Moyston raised it without dismounting, and held the gate open for Maud to pass; but just as he was about to follow, his horse, startled by a sudden plunge from Alfred's steed, swerved—the gate slipped from his hand, and closed with such force as to cause the hook to spring back, and the bolt shot into its place.

Lord Moyston muttered an oath and exclaimed: 'Couldn't you manage your horse better than that, Meredith? Here's a pretty position for us! Lady Maud on the other side of that confounded gate and no means of joining her, save to ride to the woodranger's cottage for the key, or round to the entrance from the road, either of which will take time.'

'Is there no other way to join her!' said

Alfred, wheeling round his horse, and trotting back some little distance from the gate.

'For heaven's sake, Meredith, stop!' cried Lord Moyston, seeing his intention; 'it is madness to attempt such a leap as that in cold blood.'

'Out of the way!' shouted Alfred, too excited to listen to reason, and riding straight at the gate with his teeth firmly set together.

A low cry escaped Maud's lips as the horse rose to the leap, and then she hid her face in her hands, for the gate was struck, and it seemed as if horse and rider must fall head foremost; but the next instant she felt her reins caught by a strong hand, and Alfred's horse stood beside her, trembling, but unhurt, like its rider.

Alfred was almost as pale as Maud herself, but irrepressible joy shone in his eyes as he

saw Lord Moyston's mortification, and noticed the hesitating glance he cast at the gate, as if he were weighing the risk of trying his chance over it.

'With a horse like your lordship's it would be madness, indeed,' said Alfred, answering that glance, and gazing proudly at Lord Waters, who now rode up with the others: 'Please to meet us at the other entrance. Lady Maud must trust herself to my care for that little way,' and raising his hat to those on the other side of the gate, he rode off with Maud in triumph, feeling sure of having crushed his rival, for he knew that a woman seldom forgives a want of daring in a man, especially where she is, herself, in question.

They were both too much moved to attempt any ordinary conversation, and rode

on in silence until they were about half-way through the wood.

'Maud! you see how powerless is any obstacle to separate me from you, save your own will! Tell me that that only impassable barrier does not exist,' exclaimed Alfred, as they came in sight of the Tower. 'Will you give yourself to one who has loved you since you were a child—since the day when you appeared to him as his good genius?'

He rested his left hand on the crutch of her saddle, leaning forward to catch a glimpse of her face, which was half averted from him. Pearly tears trembled on her long lashes, and without raising her eyes she laid her hand softly upon his. He clasped it eagerly, whispering rapturous thanks and words of love. . . .

'Have you then been always constant?'

asked Maud after a little time, and looking up archly, greedy for renewed assurance of the greatness of her influence over him, even when he was far away and she was a child.

'Real love *must* be constant,' he answered, 'and the love which neither separation nor absence of hope could keep from growing up in my heart surely deserves to be called real!' . . .

No doubt the feeling was real, although it was based rather upon imagination than upon any true knowledge of Maud; he always thought of her as she had appeared to him on the day of his mother's death, as his good angel, and the perfected form of the bright and beautiful child who had forgotten pride and all thought of self, at one word from him desiring aid for his dear sufferer. To Maud then in a special manner was given

the care of her own happiness. If she could appreciate and merit the love which had been so faithful to an ideal, how much more full would it become for the reality!'

CHAPTER III.

What is the world to them—
Its pomps, its pleasures, and its nonsense all—
Who in each other clasp whatever fair
High fancy forms, and lavish hearts can wish?

THOMSON'S 'SEASONS.'

THE weather, which had been very bright in the morning, had already seemed a little threatening before the riding-party set out, and by the time the two divisions met again at the road entrance to the Tower Wood a few drops of rain had fallen, and Mrs. Haggerston said they must ride home as fast as possible. This arrangement delighted Maud, who longed to be alone and escape from the arch smiles as well as the displeased looks which greeted her as she rode up with Alfred,

feeling too conscious that her colour was brighter than could be accounted for by a slow ride through a wood.

On reaching home she went up to her room, on the plea of taking off her damp habit at once; instead of which she dismissed her maid who waited to assist her, and seated herself in a luxurious chair before the fire. She had left the door a little open so that she could see, without changing her place, anyone who passed, and about a quarter of an hour afterwards she heard her brother's step. Perhaps he was coming to seek her! But no, he went on, and she started up and called to him—

'Dick, come in here for a moment, I want to speak to you.'

'Pray be quick then,' replied Lord Waters impatiently, as he followed her into the room,

'for I must hasten to write those letters which you made me neglect for the tiresome riding-party.'

'I will not detain you very long, for I suppose you know what I wish to speak to you about?' said Maud, coldly, and resuming her place near the fire. Before he came in she had felt in a particularly softened mood, and had intended to be very gentle and humble towards him, acknowledging that perhaps she had too easily received the attentions of his friend, although without giving him any right to think that she would accept him; and, as Alfred was the only person that she had ever really liked, her brother must forgive the past, and make her happy by his approbation of her choice. But his chilling manner dispelled all such gentle thoughts, and she no longer sought to win from him the consent

which she considered he was not justified in refusing.

'He would be a bold man who would venture to say he knew what you wished upon any subject at a given time, since it would seem to be one thing yesterday and another to-day: therefore it will save time if you will tell me at once what you do wish to speak to me about.'

'About my own happiness, which you have the power to forward or retard. I have promised Alfred Meredith to become his wife, but he told me that you refused to sanction his proposals on the plea that I gave another the right to consider me almost engaged to him; therefore I wish to tell you at once that I regard such a charge as more than exaggerated, and that I am resolved to marry Alfred.'

'And I am resolved to mark my disapprobation of your capriciousness towards my friend by exacting the forfeiture of your fortune, as my father's will gives me the power to do, should you refuse to listen to reason, and marry without the consent of your family. How will you like to be a complete dependent upon Alfred's generosity?'

'You omitted one condition in regard to the power which has been given to you over me—that it was to end on my coming of age, therefore, by waiting a little less than a year, I can marry Alfred without becoming a dependent on his generosity. I do not like to defy you, however, and I hoped that when I told you I was really attached to him you would no longer oppose our marriage; such opposition cannot alter my feelings towards

your friend Lord Moyston, and will only be a pitiful gratification of resentment on your part, authorised by the letter but not the spirit of our father's will, by which he only intended to save me as far as possible from making a bad or foolish choice; and you know as well as I do that, if he were alive now, he would not consider Alfred as either the one or the other. Is there a single objection to him that you can name unconnected with Lord Moyston?'

'Yes, and I told him of it also: difference of religion!'

'But you said that if Alfred refrained from interfering with Moyston for six months you would then recognise his right to win me if he could, therefore it is not the difference of religion that induces you to refuse your consent now.'

'I never said that it was that alone, but I consider it is a strong point against Alfred, whilst Moyston is of our own faith, and has received encouragement from you such as renders your acceptance of another worse than capricious; and I tried, by appealing to Alfred's honour, to save you from this for the present, and give you time to reflect seriously on your own conduct, but I tried in vain.'

'Of course you did,' exclaimed Maud, 'because it was evident that you were forcing a point simply to obtain the accomplishment of your own wishes. You could not say that I was, even in honour, engaged to your friend, although I may have flirted with him, and even that was owing to your thrusting him in my way whenever we met. Had Alfred listened to you and allowed me to go away

to-morrow without any assurance of his affection after all his marked attention, I would never have forgiven him, and should have considered that he had not acted with honour or truthfulness towards me. But all this discussion is useless, I must give Alfred your final answer. Is it to be that of a brother who desired his sister's happiness, and therefore tried to forward her marriage with the person whom he thought most fitted for her, yet, on finding that she was attached to another, grants the desired consent; or that of a selfish guardian who is resolved to prevent her happiness as far as the law gives him power, in order to revenge upon her his own disappointment?'

'I cannot answer the question in that form,' replied Lord Waters with an effort to repress all hastiness. 'I have only to say

that I will do all I can to delay, if I cannot prevent, a marriage which I disapprove of, and that you shall never see Alfred with my consent during these ten months. Now you have my final answer, and for your sake I hope you will not act in such a manner for the remainder of this day as to cause the people here to talk about you still more than before: they have no doubt already censured you pretty freely, and family dissensions should never, if possible, be allowed to become public.'

'Then there is one point on which you are vulnerable, my Lord,' thought Maud, as her brother left the room, closing the door with an impatient bang. 'How silly of you to let me know it!'

She came down to dinner on that day, dressed with especial care, and wearing in

her hair an ornament of torquoise, pearls, and emeralds, representing a bunch of forget-me-nots—Alfred had said at luncheon a day or two before that the forget-me-not was his favourite flower. During the evening she received his attentions in so marked a way as to lead everyone to suppose that they were engaged.

She was vexed with her brother for having refused his consent to her marriage with Alfred, even after he saw that such a refusal could not induce her to relinquish it; nevertheless she enjoyed the struggle, and the sight of his irritation at her calm defiance of all his recommendations amused and incited her to parade more than ever her preference for Alfred.

'Henceforth that gate of the Tower Road must be called the Lover's Leap, Lord

Waters,' said young Mrs. Haggerston, tapping his arm with her fan as she passed him in going to the piano, and glancing towards Maud and Alfred; 'and the little ride together after such a feat was a perfect opportunity for completing the conquest. I have your permission to congratulate Lady Maud on her intended marriage?'

'Certainly not!' replied Lord Waters, impatiently; 'as far as I have any voice in the matter I can unhesitatingly answer that my sister is not engaged to be married.'

Mrs. Haggerston opened her large childish blue eyes to their widest extent; then, with a little shrug of the shoulders which seemed to say, I don't understand you, she passed on and seated herself at the piano, when a long and brilliant composition of Chopin's, which prevented conversation from reaching any ears

save those to whom it was particularly addressed, enabled Alfred to thank Maud for her public acceptance of him, and to ask if she had succeeded in obtaining any concession from her brother.

'On the contrary,' she replied, 'he has said that he will take every means to prevent me from seeing you during the ten months that must elapse before I am of age.'

'But you will be my wife long before that, Maud?' exclaimed Alfred. 'Your brother has no control over your actions, only over your fortune, and what's that to us? You surely will not let it divide us even for a time!'

Maud's colour deepened as his earnest eyes rested upon her face, pleading still more eagerly than his words for a favourable answer, yet her pride rebelled against the idea of

being deprived of her fortune and of becoming, as Lord Waters said, a complete dependent on Alfred's generosity.

'Oh Maud, why are you silent?' urged Alfred, unable to wait any longer for an answer. 'To hesitate is to imply a doubt of my affection; you do not suppose that your fortune could add to or take away from the value of such a gift as yourself?'

'No, no! who could ever doubt your disinterestedness? I least of all; yet we must wait, Alfred.'

'I will not wait! I will not lose a year's happiness, Maud, for the sake of a few thousands!'

'You will wait if I ask you for my sake! Do not answer me now, but come to-morrow morning at eleven. I shall be in the cloisters, and then we can speak of this more freely

and fully. Now, go and talk to somebody else; we have shown Waters that we are neither children nor so dependent on his good-will as to be threatened into obedience, and there is no object in defying conventionality beyond a certain point.' And she dismissed him with a smile which almost repaid him for the sentence of banishment.

CHAPTER IV.

Il est si doux de s'humilier devant ce qu'on aime! Et si l'orgueil vous retient, si nous voulons être un théâtre même devant notre ami, l'aimons-nous?—LACORDAIRE.

THE cloister alleys were a certain number of walks, communicating one with another like so many arcades, formed of yew-trees, so closely planted and skilfully trained into arches, that even in wet weather but little damp penetrated through the thick evergreen walls. They were supposed to be the work of some good monk, for it was a tradition in the Haggerston family that they were as old as the Abbey itself.

Maud had chosen them for her trysting-

place, because, even if it rained she knew that she could keep her appointment there; but the skies seemed to smile upon her tryst, for the sun shone brightly as she wended her way thither on the following morning, whilst her brother supposed her to be engaged, like himself, in superintending the preparations for their departure, as they were to leave the Abbey at two o'clock.

Maud was punctual to the time named, yet she found Alfred waiting, and his first words showed her that it would indeed be a difficult task to resist his prayers for their immediate union. The poet says—

> Sure as light flows fra the sun,
> Fra love proceeds complying.

Yes! no doubt; when love is unmixed with thoughts of self, and pride will bend in homage before it, as the fire-worshippers

before their god. Maud, however, had not reached to this; self was not forgotten in another's happiness becoming her own, she could not bear to owe everything to her husband, and allow her brother to triumph so far as to gain, by her defiance of his legal authority, some twenty thousand pounds; whilst by exacting from Alfred the sacrifice of a year's delay to his happiness, her pride would be doubly satisfied, in the consciousness of entering the Meredith family as a well-portioned bride, and in having obtained her own way in spite of all opposition and without incurring any penalty.

'You cannot love me, Maud, or you would not let *such* an obstacle keep us asunder for a long year, during which I may only see you by stratagem,' replied Alfred, reproachfully, after listening to her reasons

for wishing to defer their marriage until she was of age. 'You would not feel that there was any humiliation in being deprived of your fortune and in accepting mine in exchange for it, if you loved me as I love you; you would like to owe all to me—happiness, honour, riches: as *I* like to think that you will be the joy, the pride, the real wealth of my life. No, no, you do not love me; you like me, perhaps, better than any other of your admirers, and that is all.'

'Now you are ungrateful; have I not shown, nay almost paraded, my preference for you above everybody and everything else; and surely we only do such things for those whom we love?' exclaimed Maud, strong in her own consciousness of having freely chosen him before all others and in spite of all difficulties; and it was true that

she did prefer him to everything—save herself. 'Have I not for your sake refused to gratify my brother's ambition by accepting Lord Moyston, and subjected myself to censure and reproach? Yet because I will not enter your family as a pauper, and set at nought the restraint which my father thought it right to allow Waters to exercise over me, you accuse me of coldness and indifference. Is it right to blame me for respecting a dear father's delegated authority until the time when it leaves me free to act on my own responsibility?'

'Do you believe that your brother, in refusing you to me until the law frees you from all dependence upon him, is acting as your father would act were he alive? If you can truly say that you believe this, Maud, then I will submit to my banishment

without another word of remonstrance. Your father's will, or supposed will, according to your conviction, would be law, indeed, to me; say then if you think he would approve of the manner in which his authority is now used?'

How gladly would Maud have taken refuge under such a shield. She felt it as a great hardship that she had to bear the weight of her refusal to comply with the fond entreaties of him whom at least she loved better than anyone else; but she was too truthful even to colour her opinion according to the expediency of the moment, although by so doing she would escape all further struggle or reproach.

'No, Alfred,' she said after a short pause, and looking up with a sudden blush; 'I believe that if papa were here now, he would

place my hand in yours notwithstanding the difference of religion, trusting to your honour never to interfere with my faith, and hoping that your own sincerity and loyalty would eventually lead you to the same great source of unity.'

'Maud!' exclaimed Alfred, delighted with her candour; 'you are again like the bright little being of that sad day, long ago, only that you are a thousand times dearer. After such an answer you do not suppose that I shall heed any of your former cold reasons for deferring our marriage! The feeling that your father would have blessed it is the dearest sanction that we could have. You must promise to be mine in a few weeks, Maud; in short, as quickly as possible, and thus reward me for those dreary years when I felt that I must never think of you, save as

the dear little playmate of my childhood; and when I courted danger as few court it who believe that life may bring them anything worth possessing. It is not to everyone that the bright privilege of being able to confer such happiness is granted, and you will not reject it?'

She was very nearly conquered, her colour came and went, and Alfred's arm stole round her waist. It was very sweet to hear over and over again that without her life was valueless to one whose homage would be dearly prized by the best and fairest among England's proud daughters; then came the thought that it would be an additional triumph if she could induce him to submit to her will and wait so many months longer for her.

'Reject the privilege?' she repeated after a few minutes silence, and gently disengaging

herself. 'Oh no! I would guard it jealously, until it could be exercised without any act of violence even against such authority as my brother's. You will wait Alfred?'

'No!—'

Maud started, and Alfred continued passionately: 'No, Maud, I will not wait, because I love you too much to be satisfied with anything less than love from you, and if a mere gratification of pride is dearer to you than my happiness for a whole year I have nothing more to say.'

'Then yesterday and to-day are to be blotted from our memory if I do not consent to deprive you of the fortune which you have a right to expect with me, and become, as your bride, a mark for general censure? Is it so, Alfred? I did not know that you could so easily efface those two pages.'

She half turned away, yet there was a pleading sadness in her voice and manner, and had Alfred been proof against this charm and wavered not in his resolve to accept nothing less than an unconditional surrender, he would perhaps have broken down her self-will and taught her once for all that her true power over him could only be obtained by the yielding of a loving heart, for she would hardly have allowed him to part from her for ever; but he could not bear to see her look pained or doubtful of his affection.

'Maud, you know that I would not efface those pages for all the world!' he exclaimed —and the victory which he had so nearly gained was lost; 'and if I believed they were as precious to you as to me, I would wait

years without a murmur rather than cause you one moment's sorrow!'

'They *are* as precious to me as to you, Alfred,' she said, repeating his words in a low soft tone, yet she was proud of her victory in making his will bend to her's; 'and it is quite as much for your sake as my own that I would defer our happiness. Perhaps also it need not be for so long a time as we fear. When Waters sees that neither time nor absence can change us, he may relent and give the consent which he knows we can eventually dispense with. We shall go to London, as usual, in the spring, and perhaps it may then all be arranged; in any case, if he does not receive you there it will be your own fault if you do not manage to meet me somewhere or other every day.'

'But until spring comes, what consolation

am I to have, Maud?' said Alfred sadly. 'Will you write to me often, very often?'

'That will depend upon you. I will never allow a letter to remain unanswered, and please to remember that I cannot receive *too* many.'

The smile which accompanied these words was irresistibly sweet to Alfred, and with fond murmured thanks he led her on still further into the woody labyrinth beyond the cloisters. Even Maud forgot how

> —noiseless falls the foot of time,
> Which only treads on flowers;

and it was not until they were startled by the ringing of the workmen's one o'clock bell, that she remembered the early luncheon.

'You will return with me, Alfred,' she said; 'there must be no appearance of stealth about our meeting. I only proposed this

walk in order that we might be able to talk without interruption. I can afford to be proud of my choice, although I submit to the right which was given to my brother to control me in regard to my marriage until I am of age!'

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CHAPTER V.

O days and hours, your work is this—
To hold me from my proper place
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
That out of distance might ensue
Desire of nearness doubly sweet,
And unto meeting when we meet
Delight a hundred-fold accrue.—TENNYSON.

LORD WATERS bore Maud's defiance of his express wishes with tolerably good grace, consoling himself with the reflection that she would probably soon grow tired of a lover who could not make her the object of his constant attention; and that for the next few months she would be effectually out of his reach, since to Maurpton Castle less than to

any other place in the world could Alfred come uninvited. And, although Lord Moyston seemed deeply offended, still Lord Waters hoped that if Maud could be cured of her present fancy he might be won back.

It was quite true that Maud required a great deal of attention, and had the separation been longer, and had her will not been roused to maintain her right to do as she pleased, her brother would perhaps not have been wrong in his calculations. But as it was she continued to believe herself deeply in love, and cruelly tyrannised over by her brother. Lord Waters however was not ill-natured, and although seriously disappointed by her rejection of his friend and political ally, he would have relented in favour of Alfred, when he saw that even after some months of separation she was still

resolved to marry him—had he not been ashamed to retract his own words, and especially as the only means he had of proving his fidelity to Lord Moyston was to maintain them.

When Easter came and they were about to start for London, Maud deigned to plead again for his consent, but his only answer was: 'You know my determination on this subject and I cannot alter it; long ago I promised Lord Moyston that at least you should never marry anyone but himself, with my consent.'

To Alfred the time had passed slowly and drearily amidst the lonely grandeur of Chiltern Park; yet he enjoyed all sporting pleasures and was never without the companionship of one or more young Indian friends, towards whom he felt the

attraction of association, and who, on their part, were quite content to pay him long visits and enjoy all the luxury of such a home. Altogether they led rather a jolly life, still it was only like camp life on a grand scale and with freedom—there was none of the charm of intimate affection and repose for which Alfred longed after his exile of five years. He had left England so young that on his return there were no old ties to be renewed, and he was too much engrossed by his love for Maud to find any pleasure in forming new ones. His cousin Joseph alone was sufficiently connected with his early life to be as a confidential friend, and in the joy caused by Maud's acceptance he had hastened to see his cousin immediately on arriving in London to tell him the glad news, believing that time and reflection must

have obliterated from Joseph's mind any feeling of ill-will, especially as Mrs. Bertram —whom Alfred regarded as the prompter of such a feeling—had died a few weeks after Mr. Meredith.

There was no lack of kindness in Joseph's answers, yet the expression of his countenance made Alfred suddenly break off his happy and confidential communications, and the thought that had occasionally crossed his mind in India recurred to him—'Perhaps Joseph had been fond of Maud! If so, what wonder that the poor fellow should smart on hearing that she is to be mine? If I had failed to win her how much I should hate the man who came to tell me that he had been successful!'

Alfred could afford to be very compassionate in those days, yet although the suppo-

sition that Joseph might have loved Maud in vain seemed to give him a new claim to sympathy and consideration, it deprived Alfred of the relief of talking about her to one who understood what their old intimacy had been, and who also knew her personally. Thus, save in his letters to herself, all the superabundance of his affection found no outlet, and the letter that announced that she would be in London at the beginning of the week after Easter was to him like an angel messenger sent to release him from purgatory.

It did seem a little hard, however, that he could not see her at once and must wait for that pleasure until the morning after her arrival, when she had promised to stroll in Hyde Park with her companion, Mrs. Gerard, who never ventured to oppose anything that

her ladyship chose to do. And when at last the longed-for moment arrived, every other feeling was forgotten in the joy of meeting again . . . .

'And you will come to-morrow at the same time, Maud?' Alfred said when she told him she must go home after an hour had happily passed in walking to and fro, whilst poor Mrs. Gerard patiently sat upon one of the neighbouring seats with an open book in her hand. 'You said at Thor Abbey that when you came to London I should see you every day, and indeed it is the least compensation you can give for the long, long privation you imposed upon me. Three whole months you were at Maurpton Castle, where it was impossible for me to seek you! It was indeed a time of mortification and penance in the desert of my own lonely home.'

'Was not Maurpton Castle as much a desert to me?' asked Maud gaily. 'I quite agree with you therefore that we ought not to lose a day of the enjoyment of our emancipation; but what I said at Thor Abbey was that it would be your fault if you did not contrive to meet me every day when we came to London. We shall drive or ride in the Park at the usual time when all the world assembles there, and if my friends cannot find me in the crowd and make their way to me in spite of difficulties their desire for my society cannot be very great, and I cannot promise to meet them constantly in private, as if they were ashamed or afraid of being seen with me in public; moreover, in the evenings people belonging to the same position visit the same houses, or can manage to do so, I suppose!'

'Trust me for that, Maud, and remember what full leave you have given me to display the badge of conquest. But you will see me again here?'

'Perhaps; if in spite of your conquest you are very obedient and leave me now to good Mrs. Gerard's safe keeping. *Au revoir*, then, till ——; you must supply the date!'

CHAPTER VI.

Whereat she starts like one that spies an adder
Wreathed up in fatal folds.—SHAKESPEARE.

FROM that day forward wherever Lady Maud Leeson went there Captain Meredith was sure to appear and make his way to her side, without deigning even to notice Lord Waters' dark looks and intentional slights, and these were halcyon days to Maud, being, as she was, the object of such marked attention. The young ladies envied her the devotion which nothing seemed to tire or check, and the elders condemned her for refusing to marry according to the wishes of her family, and gravely shook their heads

——'Love marriages so seldom turned out happily! . . . .'

Joseph Bertram heard such censures with jealous satisfaction, although he mingled but little in the gay world. Since his uncle's death he had applied diligently to his profession, and his reputation for talent, and the known fact that he did not require to practise for an income, soon gained him a large circle of patients. Maud had thus been many weeks in London before she met him. Lord Waters' disapprobation of her marriage with his cousin seemed a sufficient excuse to him for not calling upon them as formerly, and it was at a state dinner-party, given by a distant connection of the Bertrams, that he met her for the first time after her engagement.

He had only time to shake hands with her

before dinner, but he was one of the first to rejoin the ladies in the drawing-room afterwards, and as he entered he saw Maud at the other end of the room languidly examining the beautiful flowers which filled and almost made a bower of the deep bay window where she sat, whilst the hostess's daughter, a shy gentle girl who had but recently made her entrance into society, was endeavouring to entertain the proud young beauty.

'Well, Lady Maud, it is a long time since we talked about the chief enjoyment of existence; have you discovered practically what it is?' said Joseph, as he crossed the room and stood before her, thus enabling the poor timid girl to escape from the social martyrdom she had been enduring.

'I shall not afford you a subject for your scoffing,' replied Maud, looking up with a

bright smile that made Joseph vow deeper vengeance than ever against his cousin, who had deprived him of all chance of winning her, although he saw that he could still interest her and banish in a moment all appearance of weariness and indifference. 'Of course you do not believe in the power of *la belle passion* to give life a brighter colouring, and perhaps that is the reason why you have never congratulated me on the prospect of becoming your cousin.'

'I have not met you since your engagement until now, and I was about to offer my congratulations, but since you assume that I cannot understand the power of love to give real enjoyment, I must not seem to mock you by wishing it to you from such a source.'

'You certainly deserve credit for so adroitly turning my words as to draw from them a

pretext for avoiding any expression of pleasure at the thought of our new relationship. I did not know that you disliked me! . . . But why are you never even at any of the houses which you used to honour with your presence last year?'

'Has Lady Maud forgotten that my position is not what it was then expected to be? Now that I have my fortune to make I must attend to my profession, and it would never answer for a medical man who wished to succeed to be seen too much in the gay world.'

'Surely it is not necessary for you so to shut yourself out from your friends; although you seem to have been hardly dealt with, Mr. Meredith left you more than sufficient to render you independent of any profession!'

'It is not an independence for a man who

was allowed to count upon twenty, or at least ten thousand a year. No, no, Lady Maud, you know too much of fashionable life not to be aware that such a difference must change all my relations in regard to it—would even render me an unfit suitor for anyone in your position, for example, whom I might have loved. But I will have the satisfaction of winning back for myself all the advantages of which I have been deprived.'

'You think you can love, then ?'

Maud's gay mocking manner stung him almost beyond bearing, and for the first time his voice as well as his words betrayed the bitterness of his feeling.

'I do not *think* about such subjects, for I know myself; and I know also, Lady Maud, that if I loved a woman who had accepted my love I would not let her trifle with it and

sacrifice my happiness, even for a time! I would not be so weakly good-natured as my cousin Alfred. My conquest should be a real conquest, or nothing!'

'Perhaps! if your strength were not measured against one who had firmness enough to do as she thought right.'

'Even so, Lady Maud. I would complete my conquest or have nothing more to do with it. I would make you yourself bend to my wishes, or leave you to weep over your work when too late. Unfortunately I have not been given the opportunity of proving my boast. And now here comes my gallant old relative and host to pay his court to you, so I will leave you for the present. Tell Alfred what I said about his weak good-nature!'

Maud went home afterwards, piqued at

having heard the delay of her marriage attributed to weak good-nature on Alfred's part, rather than regarded as a homage due to her great influence over him, and she resolved to ask her brother's consent once more, and tell him distinctly, that even if he still refused it she would not go back to be a prisoner at Maurpton Castle. Parliament had just closed, and she knew that Lord Waters was impatient to leave London, but she did not know that her petition could not have been made at a better time.

On that very evening he had learned that Lord Moyston had procured for another a situation which he had almost promised to him for one of his humble supporters, and also that the noble Lord was about to be married to the daughter of Lord Wicklow, one of his greatest political opponents.

These things wounded him deeply; he felt as if his friend—for whose sake he had alienated the affection of his sister, and quarrelled with his earliest companion—had betrayed him, and that but for a certain feeling of shame he would gladly retract his prohibition against Alfred.

He met a friend the next day who urged him to join a party about to start for a six weeks' tour in Sweden and Norway, and accepted the proposal, pleased with the idea that it would compromise matters were he to tell Maud that he would not exact the forfeiture of her fortune if she still wished to marry Alfred at once, but that he should mark his displeasure by absenting himself until the marriage had taken place.

'Maud, I have some news for you,' he said, following her to the drawing-room door

after dinner, and feeling rather awkward about alluding to the forbidden subject; I am going to Norway for six weeks, or perhaps a longer time, and you—you can—'

'Return to Maurpton Castle, I suppose you meant to say?' interrupted Maud impatiently. 'But that is just what I cannot, or rather will not do. I have been wishing all day to speak to you quietly about my engagement.'

Lord Waters looked inexpressibly relieved: it would be easy for him to proceed now that she had broken the ice, yet he remained silent in order to hear what more she had to say. Maud continued, after a moment's pause, surprised at her brother's undisturbed manner of listening to her:

'I will not speak of all the pain you have inflicted upon Alfred and upon me, for I

suppose you are indifferent to that; but our present position must be very unpleasant even to yourself, and you gain nothing by prolonging it, since, at the expiration of a few months we can marry without your permission. Alfred is almost angry with me because I will not, by becoming his wife in spite of your displeasure, deprive him of the fortune he has a right to receive with me, and I determined to appeal again to your sense of justice not to overstrain any longer a power which you as well as I know our father never intended to be used as you are now using it. There has been time enough for your vexation about Lord Moyston to grow weary, and for reason and justice to be heard—do not refuse to listen to them, Waters!'

'I tell you what it is, Maud, I am heartily

tired of contest and discussion, and you may go your own way now; I have done all I could do to induce you to relinquish a marriage to which I think there are grave objections, but as I see you are determined I will no longer interfere with you. I am going to Norway, and, if you choose to marry during my absence do so, and I will meet Alfred as your husband on my return; but I will not see him beforehand, for, as Alfred Meredith, I have not forgiven him. Meanwhile you can go to your aunt, Lady Emma Chievers, and Sir Hugh will see that whatever is necessary in regard to legal arrangements is properly done.'

CHAPTER VII.

So that there is not any space
Of sun or shade, but haunted is
With ghosts of many sweetnesses.
OWEN MEREDITH.

MAUD had promised not to tell her betrothed of the consent which had been given to her marriage until her brother had gone, yet even the news that Lord Waters was going abroad and that she was to stay with her aunt was a relief to Alfred, for at Lady Emma Chievers' house he could visit her occasionally.

Lady Emma, the sister of the late Lord Waters, and widow of Sir Hugh Chievers of Ballychievers, had lived in a pretty villa on the banks of the Thames, at Richmond, from

the time of her eldest son Sir Hugh's marriage, an event which had taken place some ten years ago. She, herself, had married very young, and her children were much older than their cousins, the Leesons; her youngest child was a girl who had given early promise of beauty, but to whom the full light of reason had been denied.

They had been able to teach poor Alice to obey and to read and write, but at twenty her intelligence was like that of a child of ten years old, yet there was a gentle touching expression of melancholy in her countenance, as if she had a vague perception that something was wanting to her. To her mother, this misfortune, which excluded her from all the natural joys of a woman's life, rendered her especially dear. Lady Emma seemed to feel as if she owed her child a

debt which demanded from her a double measure of love and care, and even her two fine intelligent boys were as nothing to her in comparison to Alice, who, like some frail and drooping flower, must be sheltered from every chilling wind.

Had Maud spent more time with her aunt, the example of such devotedness without a hope of gratification in return might have taught her lessons such as the blind indulgence of her parents, or her governesses' code of stern duty had failed to teach: the difference between love and love—between loving another for one's self and for that other's sake alone; and the difference between justice and generosity—between giving what we consider it a duty to give, and giving for the pleasure of affording happiness or brightening a saddened life.

Unfortunately Lady Emma had left Ireland when her niece was still a child; and, afterwards, during the London season, Maud had little time to spare from the gay world for visits to the villa at Richmond, where the presence of her pretty but afflicted cousin affected her own spirits unpleasantly. In the present case, however, the thought of going to stay there pleased her, for her aunt had always taken Alfred's part. He had won Lady Emma's favour for ever by his attention to Alice one day when they met by chance at the Botanical Gardens, where, on seeing that the poor girl took pleasure in looking at bright-coloured flowers, he led her from one conservatory to another, and never seemed to tire of answering her childish questions.

'I am so glad that Waters has given in at last,' Lady Emma said on the evening of

Maud's arrival, as they sat at the open window, and Alice glided about among the flower-beds in front of the house, humming softly to herself; 'for Alfred is such a fine-hearted fellow, that any woman ought to be proud of being loved by him as you are loved, and as he has always chosen the good that he has known it will only depend on you to show him the perfect beauty of Revealed Truth, and he will gladly embrace it. Such men as he love beauty and goodness as soon as they are known to them.'

'Aunt Emma, is that your idea of the brightest way of spending a honeymoon?' exclaimed Maud with a laugh. 'Yet you are not an old maid!'

Lady Emma's eyes rested sadly upon the fair form of her own child, and she sighed as she turned again to Maud:

'Long years ago, when my poor Alice was a lovely babe, I sometimes foolishly dreamed of such an hour for her as you are now enjoying; and I do not think I would have given her a clouded idea of what a honeymoon ought to be, nor would you accuse me of having such an idea had you thought a little more of what I said. I meant that it will depend on you to lead your husband to love Truth, by showing him how much beauty it could add to your natural gifts, and how much fuller happiness it enables you to bring to him. You see then that my idea, not only of the honeymoon but of the whole of life with the one whom we love, is more rather than less glowing with brightness than yours would appear to be.'

'But you seem to think that perfection is to be demanded from me, and nothing at all

from your favourite, Alfred. I should not have borne all that I have borne for his sake from Waters' opposition, if I had not been foolishly in love with him, and of course I expect to be very happy; "one good turn deserves another," you know, and if he makes me happy, I will make him so.'

'It ought to be otherwise; if you make him happy, he will make you so! Remember that Alfred knows nothing of the *supernatural* life which you happily possess, and greater perfection must of course be expected from you than from him on that account: you have been guided by a higher teaching, and it would be sad indeed were he to act more in conformity with the good impulses of his simply natural light, than you in conformity with the beautiful inspirations of supernatural light.'

Maud laughed, and laid her hand upon Lady Emma's.

'I must tell Alfred that you are half in love with him yourself, and that in your eyes, I am, according to my natural character, far less noble and generous-hearted than he is. . . . I do believe,' added Maud in a softened tone, 'that you would think anyone the most perfect of creatures if he showed Alice any especial attention or affection.'

Lady Emma did not answer, and Maud continued after a few moments' silence:

'Alfred is coming to see me to-morrow, but he does not know that Waters has given any kind of consent to our marriage.'

'Then Alfred shall not guess it from me, you must have the pleasure of giving him that glad surprise. Hugh will arrive the day

after to-morrow, and then we can arrange with him for the wedding to be celebrated at Ballychievers; my home is no place for such festive scenes.'

'But you will go with me to Ballychievers, Aunt Emma, and see the last of Maud Leeson?'

'Nay, my child, you know I never go anywhere without Alice, and a gay party—as you will be there—would only crush her, and cause her to suffer by awakening the dim consciousness that she is different from others. You would not wish me to go under these circumstances, Maud?'

'No, certainly not,' replied Maud: 'but' she added in her own mind, 'surely Aunt Emma makes too great a sacrifice to Alice of everyone's pleasure; she might leave her for a few days to old nurse's care and come to my

wedding, especially as I am not intimate with Hugh's wife.' . . .

On the following afternoon Alfred came, and, after they had conversed together for a little time in the drawing-room, Lady Emma asked if he would like to take a stroll in the grounds, they had 'such a pretty walk overlooking the Thames,' she said. Alfred gladly assented, hoping to be more alone with Maud than when they were all together in doors. He knew that Lady Emma had always been his friend, and although she had told Maud that they must not make a practice of meeting at her house, as she did not wish to aid in widening the disagreement between her nephew and his sister, Alfred fancied that, as Maud was now staying with her, she would not be too stern a guardian; nevertheless he was most agreeably surprised

when, on reaching the pretty walk she had spoken of, he turned round to tell her how much he admired it, he found that she and Alice had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

Il n'est pas vrai qu'un sentiment pour être fort soit nécessairement exclusif ; loin de là, une affection très-vive, *si elle est heureuse,* mettant en jeu nos facultés aimantes, ajoute à leur activité hors même du cercle de l'intérêt premier. Ah ! qu'elle est riche la surabondance d'un cœur touché.

MADAME SWETCHINE.

THE walk was thickly lined with trees, the branches of which met overhead and formed one long arch; stray beams of sunshine peered through the dark rich foliage, making

. . . lacework on the mossy ground ;

and the low sweet music of the birds mingled with the swift yet rippling sound of the fast-flowing river. . . . In the midst of this beautiful harmony of nature Alfred stood

alone—quite alone with Maud, for the first time since they had wandered together in the yew cloisters of Thor Abbey. With a murmured exclamation of joy he drew her close to him and they walked along together.

'Your Aunt is an angel, Maud!' he said at length, yet it was an effort to him to break that happy silence. 'I fancied that she liked me, but I never ventured to expect that she would give me such enjoyment as this! . . . What would Waters say if he could see us now and know that Lady Emma had deliberately brought us here and left us together?'

'Perhaps he would not be very much surprised!' said Maud raising her head a little from Alfred's shoulder and looking at him with a half-amused, half-shy expression.

Suppose I were to say that I think the early autumn sunshine would suit bridal attire better than the snows of January, then Waters could not wonder that I should enjoy walking thus with him who might, if he particularly wished it, be my husband in a few weeks?'

Alfred's eyes sparkled with a fuller joy than Maud had ever seen in them save on that day in the Tower Wood when she had accepted his love.

'Wholly mine at last!' he murmured. 'Maud, I can never thank you enough for this sweet proof that your love has been stronger than your pride and every other worldly feeling. How happy we shall be! And how much more than ever I shall owe you for not allowing that hateful fortune of yours to stand any longer between me and

my happiness! I am so glad also to think that I shall never touch a penny of Waters' money!'

Maud could not help being moved at his delight, and the generous feeling that he would only owe her the more if she consented to come to him a portionless bride. It cost her a pang to disappoint him. She felt ashamed of her own victory, and almost wished that she had yielded to his entreaty for an early marriage before her brother had spoken to her.

'But the money would be mine, not his, Alfred, and you would not object to receive anything that was mine? Waters said before he went away, that if I chose to marry you at once he would not exact the forfeiture, and that on his return he would meet you on friendly terms as my husband, but not

before; for as Alfred Meredith he had not forgiven you.'

'Then it is your brother who has ceased to oppose a vain resistance to your will, and not you who have yielded to the promptings of love, as I fondly thought? You gave me a glimpse of paradise, Maud, and have pulled me down to earth again. Would that you had been less determined!'

'Your disappointment, when I meant to give you only pleasure, has made me feel for the first time that I have been wrong.'

She clasped her hands round his arm and looked up pleadingly at him. It seemed that the last night's conversation with her aunt had made some little impression, inclining her to so unwonted an act of gentle humility. Whatever the cause may have been it was an unfailing way of disarming Alfred, and

almost repaid him for the previous disappointment, and the remainder of their walk was a time of unmixed delight.

It was finally settled that the marriage should take place at Ballychievers in the second week of September, but Alfred's request was granted that Maud should remain with Lady Emma almost until the eve of the wedding, so that he might not be deprived of the happiness of seeing her during the intervening time.

'I suffered too much when you were far away in Ireland last spring to let you go there again if I can help it, until I may follow you in a few days,' he said, when it was proposed that she should go back with Sir Hugh about the middle of August.

Alfred's new happiness called forth all the generosity of his nature, and he longed

to make his friends share in some degree his own joyous contentment—his cousin especially, because he knew that, although unintentionally on his part, he had been the cause of a great disappointment to him; but in vain he tried to think of how to give him some real pleasure without affording any real pretext for a refusal.

'It is useless I suppose for me to invite you again to my wedding,' Alfred said one evening, as he bade his cousin farewell; 'but Maud begged me to press you once more and to give you this invitation from her cousin Sir Hugh Chievers.'

'You know that I shall return from Scarboro' only a few days before you start for Ireland, and I could not be absent from London so soon again even for a short time. You see therefore that it really is professional

duty that forces me to refuse you and Lady Maud; but when you are married and come to London you shall have no cause to complain of me as a negligent visitor, perhaps you will find that you may have too much of my company.'

A day or two afterwards Alfred saw in the 'Times' an announcement of the immediate sale of a rare library which had been collected by Dr. A——, a celebrated physician and chemist; and he remembered having heard Joseph say when the sale was first advertised that such a collection would be a mine of precious wealth to a young medical man. That announcement seemed like an inspiration to Alfred, he could purchase the collection and have it arranged by a librarian in his cousin's own study during his projected absence. . . .

When Joseph returned from Scarboro' he could not repress the first movement of pleasure on finding himself in possession of the coveted treasure; but it was quickly followed by a feeling of vexation, for although the servants could only tell him that the gentleman who had left his card with the catalogue had said that he came by order, to superintend the arranging of the library purchased for Dr. Bertram, Joseph immediately surmised that Alfred was the donor. In spite of his vexation, however, he was a little touched by Alfred's perseverance in order to give him a pleasure which he could not well reject, and for a moment his fierce yet silent jealousy was almost overpowered by this act of forbearing goodness and thoughtful generosity—but for a moment only did the better influence last.

'No, I can never forgive him!' he murmured, as if in answer to his own thoughts; 'and he must suffer for having deprived me of the power even to contend with him for the woman whom I loved as he, with his shrinking sensitiveness, could never love; nor can he ever be so loved by Maud—for there is ardour hidden in *her* nature! But the end is not yet come. . . . As for this gift, I have not accepted it, he has forced it upon me; and although he is my nearest kinsman, and I wish not to offend him, he must know that I receive it in this way; no one shall ever have a right to reproach me with having received a favour from him.' He drew his desk towards him and began to write:

'My dear Alfred,—As you start for Ireland to-morrow morning, and as I have

but just returned to town, I can only acknowledge your costly gift by letter. It was very kind of you to take so much trouble to provide me with this rare and precious collection. You certainly have succeeded in making me a valuable present in such a manner as to render it impossible for me to decline it, but as it has been forced upon me rather than accepted by me, you will not expect any warm expression of gratitude. You know that *willingly* I never receive favours.

'For the coming happy event accept for yourself and Lady Maud, the congratulations of your cousin,

JOSEPH BERTRAM.'

He folded the letter and sent a servant with it to Alfred's lodgings in Brook Street.

About a week afterwards he received cards from Captain and Lady Maud Meredith, and heard the marriage commented upon among the few lingerers in London, as 'a desperate love match.' 'Had not Lady Maud preferred Captain Meredith to Dukes and Earls? Had she not so displeased her brother by such a choice that he would not give her away, and had prolonged his tour on the Continent because he would not be present at the wedding?' . . .

Are not what are called love-marriages very often nothing more than marriages of choice, or even of self-will? . . . 'Love is devotedness; to choose is to prefer one being to all others; to be devoted is to prefer that being to one's self!'

CHAPTER IX.

Si beaucoup d'affections s'arrêtent à ce point, c'est que beaucoup d'affections ne sont qu'un égoïsme déguisé.

LACORDAIRE.

THE married life of Lady Maud Meredith seemed to corroborate the popular notion that love marriages seldom turn out happily. When there was no longer any occasion for the display of ardent admiration, which had charmed her in the days of their wooing, she began to undervalue her husband's affection. The fact that he was a military hero, she thought, did not render him the less inferior to her intellectually, and the idea crept into her mind that she was 'unequally yoked.'

Alfred's love had been the true feeling. Although inspired by an ideal formed from early recollections—and it was certainly in Maud's power to realise that ideal—his judgment had not erred; what he loved and fancied he saw in her, was only what she might have been had she not been allowed to grow up so full of complacency in her own gifts, and with so exaggerated a sense of what was due to her.

No doubt her husband could have broken down all such assumption of superiority had he possessed sufficient moral strength to inflict upon her, and therefore upon himself, a few hard lessons, instead of yielding to his old weakness of avoiding whatever hurt his sensitive pride. Thus, although they never quarrelled in the ordinary acceptation of the word, they drifted further and further apart,

until, at the end of a few years, they seldom met except at dinner, for Maud had lately begun to fancy herself too delicate to leave her room in the morning.

They had three children, a boy and two girls, yet these little ones did not appear to form any strong tie between the parents, fond as each was of them in his or her own way. Alfred liked to amuse them and see them look happy, and Maud liked to tutor them and to feel her maternal pride gratified by hearing them praised. . . .

'Joseph is coming to dinner to-day, Alfred,' Maud said on a Sunday afternoon, as she met her husband by chance on the stairs.

'Is he?' replied Alfred, 'then you must entertain him without me. Waters and I are going to dine out of town.'

'How provoking! It will seem so rude

to your cousin. Why did you not tell me of your engagement?'

'My dear Maud, it is a long time ago that we remembered to tell each other of our engagements! And Joseph is so agreeable, you will hardly miss me. As for seeming rude to him, it will not be the first time that he has dined here when I have been absent.'

'Of course not, but on a Sunday he will expect to find you at home; in London especially, one is not supposed to have engagements for dinner-parties on that day.'

'It is precisely because London is such a kill-joy place on a Sunday that Waters and I have made up this party. In this month of May the sight of green trees and fields is very preferable to dreary and dusty streets!'

'You and Waters might have a little more

consideration for others! I remember the time when you and *he* were not such great friends.'

'And so do I, Maud!' . . .

There was something in the tone of her voice that recalled happier days, and Alfred would probably have broken his engagement had she asked him to remain at home as if she really wished for his society, but she turned away and went down to the carriage which was waiting to take her to Vespers, feeling aggrieved and neglected.

'Joseph was better fitted to be Maud's husband than I am!' thought Alfred, as he watched the carriage on its way; 'she reads the books he praises, and studies the music he admires, as if his taste were faultless; whilst she seems to think that I cannot appreciate such things, and can only admire

what is inferior. He is her oracle! She follows his opinion and advice, and ignores mine, yet her vanity alone is gratified by the idea that a man of distinguished talent should seek her society so much—she is too proud ever to feel otherwise to any man! Joseph shall never have a right to accuse me of distrust, although there are times when I can hardly refrain from cursing him, so much has he seemed to widen the separation between Maud and me, yet without ever uttering a word that I could take offence at! . . . Pshaw! have I not long ago accepted my position? I believe it was her allusion to the days when I almost hated Waters for keeping her from me that has called up all these phantoms. Heigh-ho! I wish her aunt, Lady Emma, had not died so soon after our marriage, she would have been a

better confidant for Maud than my clever cousin!' . . .

He went to the children's play-room, and his coming was, as usual, greeted with loud joy, nevertheless, after a little gambol he left them. They were too young to be anything like companions.

Long ago he had discovered that the actual Maud was not the Maud whom he had worshipped in his youth, yet her place remained unfilled; he had never even imagined that he loved another. As his wife he treated her with respect and even generosity, he trusted her fully, allowed her uncontrolled liberty, and there was no enjoyment which he could procure for her that he did not take care to place within her reach. His only retaliation for her assumption of superiority was manifested in leaving her altogether to

herself; thereby showing her that if she deemed it beneath her to try to render him happy, she must bear the mortification of seeming to be neglected. Outside of his home he sought and found pleasure, but his heart was still unsatisfied.

As Maud and Alfred became estranged, a closer intimacy seemed to grow up between him and her brother than had ever united them, even in their boyhood. In Alfred, whose nature was essentially conservative, this friendship was perhaps cemented by a clinging to the past. The Waters' had been his earliest friends, and he had joyfully accepted the offered reconciliation when Lord Waters returned after the marriage, and seemed to wish for a renewal of the old cordiality—for, although he never expressed in words any regret for his former opposition,

his conduct certainly expressed a full acknowledgment that he had been wrong and over-hasty.

During the years which had elapsed a gradual change had been wrought in Lord Waters's own character; he was still unmarried and still devoted to the interests of his country, but all his sentiments regarding the means by which those interests would be best promoted were greatly modified. This change also tended to raise his opinion of his brother-in-law, who had been so staunch to his conservative principles, even when he was a young unpledged man, and when he might have gained his ardent love-suit with but little difficulty by giving his support to the opposite party. The more Lord Waters saw of Alfred the more he liked him, he had even ventured to tell Maud plainly

that her husband was only too good for her, and it was nonsense for her to pretend that he could not understand her fine tastes. . . .

CHAPTER X.

Do you know what the demagogue is? The man who rouses the camels into impatience of their burdens, that he may rifle the baggage as it falls to the ground in the strife.

OUIDA.

THE dinner-party of which Alfred had spoken to his wife was to meet at Richmond, and as he and Lord Waters rode down together on horseback, their conversation turned upon the events of the previous evening.

'I was beginning to hope better things of you, Waters, but last night you were exciting De Barsac's anglophobia again with all the eagerness of a repealer. Do let old England alone to day. If you begin to abuse us I shall certainly decamp and leave you to your-

selves. . . . How can you bear to seek for pity, and from a foreigner too?

> I'd rather be a dog and bay the moon
> Than such a Roman!'

'How can you expect us to be in love with the English Government?'

'If I had no other objection to your creed, I could never consider disloyalty or disaffection a test of orthodoxy! To me it seems to contradict all the teaching of religion, and sets an impassable barrier between us. "Fear God and honour the king" are things which naturally hang together.'

'Your kings have little enough of claim to honour from us, or even your governments.'

'Are you quite sure that the Government is not the effect rather than the cause of your condition? Pharaoh's heart was *hardened*, you know, when he would not let the children

of Israel go! I am not a politician, but my little experience at home and abroad leads me to conclude that there is a power above us overruling things, so that each has generally what is best for him. "Whatever is *is* right!" I do believe. . . . You complain of your poverty! How can it be otherwise? The favourite resorts of Europe are thickly strewed with Irish proprietors, small and great; they spend in foreign countries the proceeds of their possessions, and wonder that their poor get poorer! In the name of reason what better results could they expect? As far as I have seen, the English landlords do more for your people than you do yourselves, with certain noble exceptions. . . . You talk a great deal of "poor Ireland," as if you were very ardent lovers of your afflicted country. Are you sure that all this is quite free from a smack

of the blarney for which you are so famous? —a dashy way of disguising, even from yourselves, a truant neglect of your

. . . own lov'd Island of sorrow?

Eh? I'm afraid there is too much reason to think so.'

'Don't *you* live abroad? Are you not to be found wherever travellers congregate?'

'Ours is not an oppressed country; our house is in order, and we go out to see the world knowing that all is well at home!'

'I admit that absenteeism is a great evil.'

'That admission lightens our load at least. We have an old saw in England which tells us that a man should cut his garment according to his cloth. Do you not think that your people have also a trick of cutting the garment without minding the cloth—of living a little, just a little, beyond their means?'

'Well, well! these are our own faults and we suffer from them, but why should *you* complain of them? They are our faults, granted; but you have yours, no country is altogether free from faults.'

'We should have no right whatever to complain if you did not try to cast your faults upon us. We do not accuse you of oppressing us and of being the cause of our griefs, and therefore you are not called upon to deal with our faults in the same manner. These two very fertile sources of poverty and misery, then, are certainly not of our creating!'

'But there are a hundred other reasons against you which you will not see in England.'

'The "hundred reasons" is surely one of the most transparent among the devices with

which you deceive yourselves. Indefinite charges have but little worth in our eyes. We are more sensitive than you suppose, and as we love you—

Not wisely (perhaps), but too well—

we have weighed the indefinite charges contained in the "hundred reasons" and found them wanting. If a complainer cannot clearly state his grievance, it is ten to one that there is none, or he is conscious that it will not bear examination. These vague charges must be mistrusted at the outset, they are not worth the notice they seek. You call this indifference, we give it another and a very different name.'

'And you would have us to believe that our poets, orators, and writers have bewailed the "wrongs of Ireland" on a false pretence?'

'Not on a false so much as an imaginary pretence. The plaintive cry of the poet is a matter of race and of its age. Your Celtic bards are as the nightingales among birds: theirs is the sweetest and most touching of songs, ours is a bolder note, but less sweet:

The harp that once through Tara's halls,

and

RULE, BRITANNIA; BRITANNIA RULES THE WAVES!'

'Ah! we cannot reach you in that domain, but even he—

The sweetest lyrist of your saddest wrongs—

belied his wailings by his life. He who enchants your ears with—

On our side is Virtue and Erin,
On theirs is the Saxon and guilt,

seemed to love England even more than Erin; he became a Saxon in language, in habits, and, it is said, even in religion. In

his matchless melodies, which have done so much to keep alive your wrongs, the uplifted hands are Esau's, no doubt, but the "voice is the voice of Jacob." It is poetical license revelling—unconsciously perhaps—in popular discontent. The poet did not believe in the Saxon "guilt" any more than others, he loved us so well, guilt and all, as to live and die among us. As to your orators and writers, they have not felt their grievances so as to unite against them—a sure sign, I should say, that they do not yet cry to heaven for vengeance!'

'Alas, that is but too true, and right well do you know how to profit by it! Our unhappy differences weaken us and make us the prey of—

The dark liver'd, cold-hearted foe:

Eh? But pardon my interruption; why are

you divided? Why? We have asked this question of ourselves and answered it, and therefore we are unmoved before your reproaches. We have learned to believe that many of the evils which you complain of are of your own creating, and you alone can cure them; that many others exist rather in your excited imagination than in any reasonable reality. As Macaulay said of Burke, your "reason, like a spirit in the service of an enchanter, is spell-bound: it does whatever work your passions impose." The real want of the disaffected among you is not the blessing of freedom but the curse of vengeance—a blight which covers all your growth, and, strange to say, chiefly affects your clergy, who should be more vigorous than the rest against its influence. There *must* be something wrong in the training under

which men learn to desire evil to their neighbours, or even to their enemies; yet what is so general in Ireland as the desire to see England humbled, and by this they mean, disgraced before the world?'

'I will not allow you to attack my religion, that is not an open question between us. The Irish clergy have kept the faith alive among us under difficulties almost insurmountable—all honour and gratitude to them!'

'Amen! and with all my heart. Attack your religion? Heaven forbid! . . . But since you employ religion so largely in proclaiming your "wrongs," we must look and see whether you do this rightly. I hope and believe that I am without prejudice in this matter; indeed my leanings are naturally all towards you, but I cannot doubt that, as a

political partisan a priest is out of his place: he owes his political influence much more to his priesthood than to his claims as a simple citizen, and too often the people mistake opinion uttered by a priest for the religious doctrine which it is his mission to teach. Your Church does not profess to teach any political creed, yet we hear no louder denunciations against the "tyranny of England" than from the lips and pens of her ministers.'

'You have never seen what Souperism really is—what attempts are made against the religion of our people, among the poor too, —where wealth is so fearfully powerful.'

'When I hear that a man has exchanged his faith for a bowl of soup, a place, an estate, or any other "pottage," I wonder if it were ever worth what was given for it! It is

not an accusation against proselytisers that you make here, but against yourselves. To admit that a man's faith has been bought, is really to admit that he had none to sell, and that he has outwitted those who paid for it. The real dupes are the buyers and not the sellers, and you must admit that there are hosts of sincere people who believe they are doing God's service in endeavouring to withdraw others from your faith to theirs. If they are wrong, it would be far wiser to teach them by example and precept, than to abuse them. A nation disaffected towards its government is but a sorry specimen of a Christian people, whatever you may think of it in Ireland.'

'It is but too true that discontent is rather encouraged than rebuked in Ireland. Nevertheless the government of England is an

oppressive and a persecuting government to us.'

'Your remedy is in your own hands: deserve a better government, and, if you have to endure tyranny or injustice, prove that it is so by resisting with one voice against it!'

'I have no mind to contend with you! On that memorable New Year's Eve, when we met you for the first time after your return from India, Mr. Haggerston shook my faith in my political colleagues. I am half inclined to believe, and it was my poor father's steadfast opinion, that no good can be expected from a party who will espouse any cause, even that of the Catholic religion—although it is the open abettor of all the attacks upon the very centre and foundation-stone of Christendom—that will serve its

own interests for the moment and help it into power!'

'I have never been able to understand the unholy alliance. We, at least, are sincere in our support of what we believe to be the Christian religion, reformed and adapted to our condition—you must give us credit for believing in our institutions as you believe in yours. If you can succeed in teaching us that we have made a mistake—a probability now in many minds—you will regret the work you are now advocating. It seems to me that you are pulling down what you ought to strengthen and build up: yours is surely a work of restoration and not of destruction!'

'I believe it is; and henceforth, I, for one, will have no further hand in it.'

'A noble and good conversion, Waters!

How changed you are since that New Year's Eve!'

'How changed we all are! You and Maud——'

Alfred touched his horse and broke into a brisk trot . . . .

CHAPTER XI.

A vain man lifteth himself up into pride, and thinketh himself born free, like a wild ass's colt.—JOB xi. 12.

A LADY once bitterly remarked of her son's pretty young wife: 'There is no danger for Geraldine in being so much alone, she has not heart enough ever to forget the virtue required by the world;' and whether this was Maud's case or not she certainly never forgot even the forms of conventionality. When Joseph or any other gentleman dined with her in Alfred's absence, the governess always made one of the party.

'Where is Alfred?' Joseph asked, after having chatted for a few minutes with Maud

before dinner was announced, and before Miss Johnson had joined them.

'He is gone to dine somewhere in the country with my brother. I forgot to send him word this morning that you were coming, and when I told him in the afternoon it was too late to break his engagement. Indeed I did not think of telling him expressly, I took it for granted that, being in town, he would be at home on a Sunday evening. I hope you will excuse him.'

'Certainly, for everything but his want of appreciation in being absent on an evening when the gay world affords you both a holiday. Conversation is the life of the mind, a pleasure but seldom to be enjoyed in what is called society. To enjoy this pleasure the minds ought to be tuned to the same key, and when a woman's mind is given

to thought its key is sometimes so high that it is not easy to find another in harmony with it.'

Maud sighed . . . . 'Is it then a misfortune for a woman to possess a mind given to thought?'

'Not if her lot is cast with those who know how to value the charm of strength combined with feminine grace!'

Miss Johnson came in, and, as Joseph advanced to meet her, Maud muttered to herself: 'How well he understands every unexpressed thought and feeling, and how well he speaks.'

Joseph had risen steadily in his profession, and a scientific discovery which he had just made was bidding fair to bring him great wealth and distinction. He had nearly achieved the victory which he had promised

to himself and others—to regain all the advantages that he had lost at starting in life; he would have done even more if his discovery should bear the test of the severe scrutiny which it had to undergo, for he would have earned lasting fame as well as fortune.

It was at the cost, however, of mental labour such as had tried his utmost strength, and had rendered him, in appearance, years older than his cousin. He felt, therefore, that his victory would be incomplete until Alfred had been made to pay a heavy penalty for all this toil and pain, for it was bitter pain to see constantly, and in all the intimacy of near relationship, her whom in secret he so passionately admired, and whom he believed might have been his wife had he not been disinherited in favour of him whose name she now bore. Yet he courted that

pain even before he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had acquired greater influence over her than her husband ever had, and, as the separation between them widened, a feeling of elation took possession of him; on that Sunday evening especially, when he saw that although she considered Alfred incapable of appreciating her, she was wounded by any outward mark of neglect on his part.

'So Lady Maud is going to lose you, Miss Johnson,' Joseph said, when they returned to the drawing-room after dinner; 'yet for your sake we cannot regret it, as you are to begin a very pleasant work for a woman, I should think, to reward with happiness one who has been faithful through all difficulties. Dr. Barker, Lady Maud tells me, is an old admirer.'

'We had not met for three years until yesterday,' answered Miss Johnson, blushing, 'and as he had never said that he liked me in the old days at home in Lancashire, I did not expect to see him again, that is—I mean not as—'

'A lover come to plead his own cause,' said Maud, smiling. 'No doubt he is now ready to worship the friend who procured the appointment which has enabled him to ask you to share his home; you must tell us if his gratitude continues to be as lively at the end of half-a-dozen years; men may be constant until they have obtained the wished-for prize, but then — Mrs. Barker must fill up the blank for us a few years hence.'

'Even then, could we hope to receive a candid answer? Are ladies ever quite candid upon these subjects?' asked Joseph.

'Miss Johnson implied just now that she did not know Dr. Barker liked her because he had never *said* so.'

'I did speak candidly then, and I knew he liked me, that it pleased him to chat with me; but I did not know that he entertained for me any stronger feeling.'

'Would you then have us to believe that you require to be *told* whether a man loves you, or is simply pleased in chatting with you? Nay, surely women are not so dull! What do you say, Lady Maud?'

For an instant his eyes rested upon her with a piercing glance. She must, he thought, know what his feelings were towards her, although she might shrink from any self-examination on the subject. He knew well that her pride was great, and that she clung to the forms of society and of

religion, but all this only rendered the thought of his triumph more precious. Religion was to him a myth, fit only for the ignorant and timid spirits who dared not to be free, and by encouraging Maud's intellectual pride he fancied he should at length render her as free from all bondage as he considered himself to be.

'After eight years is it not time for me to have forgotten any knowledge I may have possessed in regard to such things?' replied Maud evasively, after a slight pause, but without any variation of colour. 'To return to the realities of life, however, I must seek to supply the loss of Miss Johnson. The coming of a stranger will be a trial to the children, but of course it cannot be avoided.'

'Dear little ones! I fear they will

quickly forget me,' said Miss Johnson, standing up. 'If you will allow me, Lady Maud, I will go to them now. I wish to be as much with them as possible for the short time that we are to remain together.' . . .

'How tiresome it is to be obliged to look for a new governess,' said Maud, when Miss Johnson had left the room. 'The children are so young that our bride-elect answered very well for them, although she is certainly not very highly gifted.'

'No, not gifted enough for the place she was so often required to fill—that of companion to you.'

'But the really gifted ones don't like to waste their talents in teaching children who, after all, are hardly beyond the care of a nursery governess; and it is only because, as you say, she is sometimes obliged to help me

to entertain my guests, that I seek a superior person. But where shall I find her? You know so well the kind of person we need, can you not help me?'

Joseph remained silent, calling to mind those whom he knew and who might be eligible. He liked that Maud should always apply to him for advice or assistance, and to prove that his judgment and taste were never at fault. He would not recommend a governess unless he were sure that the fitness of his choice could not be questioned, therefore he thought for a long time before he answered—

'A patient of mine, a Mrs. Lindsay, has an only daughter, gifted enough I should think to be a treasure to anyone who would not fear comparison with her. In many houses, therefore, she would not perhaps

succeed, *here* she could only hold her proper place. I think she would suit you.'

'And does she wish for a situation as governess?'

'I should fancy it would be a relief to the mother to know that her daughter would have any home when she herself is at rest, and her life can hardly be prolonged for more than eight or ten days. Yesterday Miss Lindsay was absent when I visited the invalid, who questioned me so earnestly about her own state that I was obliged to tell her it was hopeless. At first she seemed in despair; on recovering a little she implored me in mercy to preserve her life, if only for a few weeks—she could not die, she said, and leave her darling Mildred homeless, destitute! Her daughter's footsteps on the stairs caused her to add hastily: "Do not

alarm her, she could not bear it, but I implore you to come to me on Monday at this time, she will be out." No doubt she has made this request in order to tell me some sad tale of reverse of fortune—for they are unmistakably gentlefolk—and to ask me to befriend her daughter. If you like, after I have heard their history, I will tell you whether I think Mildred Lindsay would suit you as a governess.'

'Yes, I should like to hear more about her. Have you known them long? How did your acquaintance begin?'

'By the merest chance. One evening—about a month ago—just as the fading daylight caused me to close my book, my attention was attracted by a crowd outside the window. I hastened to see what was the matter, and found a young lady trying to

support an elderly person who seemed to be fainting. The poor girl appeared to be in the greatest trouble, and some one in the crowd told me that she had asked a boy to get a carriage. I went to her, told her that I was a physician, and begged to be allowed to carry the sufferer into my house, where she could receive every needful assistance. Without waiting for permission I carried the almost insensible form into my study, the young lady following us. I need not tell you they were Mrs. and Miss Lindsay.'

'And what is the sequel to such an introduction? According to all the rules of romance you ought to fall in love.'

'For that, even according to the rules of romance, our ideal of beauty must never before have assumed a living form—a pretty pink seems colourless after we have gazed

upon a *géant de bataille* rose,' interrupted Joseph. 'Have you read M——'s new work? It is full of power and originality.'

'But M——'s new work is not the sequel to the Lindsay story. Please to tell it to me.'

'Unless Lady Maud wishes me to compose an impromptu story for her special amusement there is really nothing more to tell. Mrs. Lindsay was already far advanced in consumption, and that fainting-fit marked a new stage in the dire disease. They were going to Edinburgh, but a severe cold which the poor lady had caught in travelling from France had necessitated rest for a few days. She had appeared better on the day when I first saw her, and they had made their arrangements to leave London on the following morning. I was obliged to forbid

it, and Mrs. Lindsay has been confined to her room ever since. You remember Madame de Staël's expression: "Maintenant que je n'ai plus faim je mangerai tant que vous voudrez." So I say; now that I have told you the true story, I am ready to improvise as you like. Does your Ladyship prefer any particular style?'

'Yes, the truthful one,' laughed Maud. 'I do not ask you to improvise at all; but, as you began by exciting my curiosity about the Lindsays, I expect you to satisfy it by a little more detail than you have pleased to give me, and as you will not relate graciously all you know, prepare for a cross-examination. Are they alone here? Have they been living in France?'

'They are alone, and Miss Lindsay seems to have known no other country than

France, although she speaks English perfectly in idiom and accent. Are you satisfied?'

'Nearly so. Have they any friends here? And had you any reason to suppose they were in such unfortunate plight before yesterday?'

'I have never seen any friends with them, and it is evident that they are in very straitened circumstances. The eagerness with which Miss Lindsay works at embroidery, fine enough to blind any human creature, shows that she depends upon it for the power of giving the invalid delicacies which are very necessary for her, but which Mrs. Lindsay makes some excuse for not taking when I prescribe them; a day or two after, however, Miss Lindsay generally tells me that she has induced her mamma to take

what I ordered, although at first she did not like the idea of it!'

'Poor girl! And now her mother cannot live more than a week or so longer, you say?'

'Not much longer than a week, in all probability.'

'But what made you think of suggesting her daughter as a desirable governess if you know so little about them?'

A barely perceptible smile flitted over Joseph's countenance as Maud scanned it furtively. It pleased her to feel that her friendship was dearer to this clever man of science than the love of any other woman, and the thought that perhaps Miss Lindsay interested him more than he admitted even to himself was not pleasing to her.

'I have already said why I thought she

would not be out of place in your home,' he answered carelessly; 'and her mother's words occurred to my mind when you asked me to think of your need of a governess and companion. But I may be altogether wrong in my suppositions. In any case you could not, of course, think of offering Miss Lindsay the place of governess in your family until we have obtained the fullest information about her; and if you hear of any other person, think no more of this conversation.'

'But I shall not hear of anyone between this and to-morrow afternoon, when you will have heard Mrs. Lindsay's tale, and, from what you say of the daughter, I should at all events like to see her. Having lived all her life in France, she would combine for the children the advantages of English training and almost a native's knowledge of French.

Will you promise to bring me all the information you can to-morrow?'

'Yes, if you wish it; but I remember that in all probability she does not belong to your faith, and this might be an objection, yet not to you, perhaps. I have always believed that sincere conviction is the virtue most admired by superior minds. . . . Am I wrong?'

Maud was too much flattered to disown the implied compliment to her mental superiority, and she resolved that if all accounts of the Lindsays proved satisfactory, she would give Mildred a trial, and see if Joseph had spoken truly when he said that '*here* she would only hold her proper place.'

'Then you will tell me if Miss Lindsay wishes for the situation, and you will not forget at the same time that I depend very

much upon your judgment,' she said, looking up at him.

'Who ever forgets that of which he is most proud? . . . But you have not answered my question about M——'s new work, and I expected you to appreciate its unconventional, even if at times rugged, beauty. Of course you have read it?' . . .

CHAPTER XII.

Mighty hearts are held in slender chains.—POPE.

MRS. LINDSAY was the only child of Mr. Mason, a rich merchant residing near Chester. He had resolved that his daughter should be inferior in nothing to the fine ladies whose ancestors dated back among the nobles of England for centuries and centuries, and whom he had known something of in early life, his father having been lawyer to certain families of great distinction. He had penetration enough not to fall into the common mistake of supposing that for this end it was sufficient to engage for her the most expensive masters, and have her

laden with accomplishments: and from the earliest age he sought to place her under the care of one who possessed all the advantages derived from association and traditional habits of careful training.

His search was rewarded in the person of a French refugee's widow—Madame de Bussy—who sought to earn the means of living in England, where she was not quite a foreigner, being by birth a MacCarthy. Clara Mason was only about six years old at this time, and, fortunately perhaps, her mother died soon afterwards, so that she was left altogether to the guidance of Madame de Bussy, who fulfilled her charge so well that when Clara had reached the age of eighteen, and when she had the sorrow to lose her devoted friend and instructress by a fatal illness which swept away many at the

same time, Mr. Mason was able to enjoy the gratifying feeling that his daughter's manner and education would fit her for companionship with any duchess in the land.

The natural consequence, however, was that Clara's culture had raised her above her social equals; and she had passed her twenty-third year without deigning to accept any of the offers made by the wealthy men of business around her, or the spendthrift young aristocrats who desired her fortune and felt that she was fit to take her place at the head of their tables, but unconsciously showed, even through their whispered vows of love, that they expected the merchant's daughter to be sensible of the honour they would confer upon her.

Her father fretted at these repeated rejections of suitors who would have placed her

in a position for which he had taken such care to qualify her ; but the girl continued to laugh at her fine admirers, and went on her way rejoicing, until she one day met Captain Lindsay of the —— Highlanders, scion of one of the most ancient families in Scotland, and heir to the chief of the Lindsay clan, who was aged and childless. As time went on, Mr. Mason saw with delight that, instead of receiving his admiration in her usual listless fashion, jesting about the attraction of gilded charms to noble young idlers, she grew coy even of mentioning his name, and her colour deepened at the slightest allusion to his intentions.

Never was the favour of a princess more humbly sued for than was Clara's now, and every day her father expected to hear that he had proposed ; but alas ! the welcome re-

quest for his daughter's hand never gladdened his ears. Meanwhile Bruce Lindsay had drawn from Clara the soft confession that his love was returned, but at the same time a promise to keep their engagement a secret, as he dared not let such intelligence reach the ears of the old Laird, until he had endeavoured to prepare him for the disappointment of his hopes regarding a certain grand alliance on which his heart was set for his young relative.

Clara tried to say that if he could not openly ask her to be his wife it was better that they should part at once; but the old story was enacted once more: Captain Lindsay accused her of loving him but little if she preferred that they should become as strangers to each other rather than conceal their engagement for a few months at most; and

she, who would have given her life for him, could not bear the imputation of indifference. The required promise was given. . . .

One day, however, he came to her in a state of great agitation. In six weeks the regiment was to leave that part of England, and he implored her to marry him privately. If she would not consent to this step he declared that he would sacrifice his whole prospect of fortune, allow the home of his childhood, which was so inexpressibly dear to him, to pass from him to a distant connection—for his uncle, thus suddenly surprised, would never forgive a public act of defiance, such as his marriage then would seem ; but all this he would do rather than go away feeling that any human power could come between him and Clara. . . . Again she yielded, and for a few weeks the pain of concealing her marriage

was lessened by her husband's ardent affection and gratitude; but when he was gone the inevitable reaction came. Her father was allowed to think that she hoped to be Bruce Lindsay's wife some day, but that there were difficulties in the way which obliged him to be silent for the present.

At Christmas Captain Lindsay went to his kinsman's, and he had promised that during his visit there he would make arrangements to acknowledge his marriage, since it had become necessary for Clara's sake; but the Laird's health had given way, and Bruce had not the courage to tell what he had done. In a few weeks, probably—he thought—all that he desired would be gained, and he would be free to take his pretty wife to his ancestral home. This was a terrible shock to Clara, yet she uttered no reproach and only

asked to be permitted to tell her father the truth—it was too much to inflict upon him the misery of believing his child to be dishonoured. Her husband feared, however, that if Mr. Mason—who was as proud a man in his way as were the Lindsays in theirs—were told of the marriage he would compel it to be proclaimed; and he answered hotly that Clara was of course free to ruin him if she liked rather than cause her father a momentary pang, since all necessity for mystery would be so quickly removed: she had only to chose betwen them. . . .

Mr. Mason at length sternly demanded the cause of her failing health, and her silence and murmured prayers not to be asked to see a doctor confirmed his worst fears. In a fury of passion he told her to go away and hide herself for ever from his

sight, and on the same day he set out for Dover, where the —— Highlanders were then quartered.

He had a slight acquaintance with a gentleman there who had formerly been in the army, and he asked him to be the bearer of a note to Captain Lindsay. 'No explanations,' he said, 'are needed, and no apology can be received.'

His friend was not long absent, and brought him in answer a sealed letter from Captain Lindsay. He tore it open with a look of scorn, but the first thing he saw was Clara Mason's marriage certificate. Even his indignation at the thought that any man could have exposed his wife to such suffering was for the moment overpowered by the delight of knowing that he could still be proud of his child; and the remembrance of his own

harshness to her, who had only been too self-sacrificing, stung him sharply. He travelled up to London that evening in order to be in time to start by the post train on the following morning, but a fearful accident occurred at a little distance from Crewe, and Mr. Mason was among the number of the killed.

He was identified by a friend who was also returning to Chester, but had not known that Mr. Mason was in the train until he saw him mutilated and lifeless. From that friend his unhappy daughter heard the sad intelligence, and received the pocket-book and other articles which were found upon him. In the pocket-book were her husband's note with the copy of her marriage certificate, and inside the envelope was written in her father's hand, 'My beloved child, I have

wronged you, forgive me!' and dated at Dover on the day before his death.

Those few words took away the worst bitterness of her grief, although for three weeks afterwards her life was in serious danger. Her husband's was the first face she recognised on regaining consciousness; but, as she recovered, his cheerless and gloomy appearance alarmed her, and at length she learned that their marriage had been abruptly disclosed to his kinsman, who had died shortly after the railway accident, having left all he possessed to the distant connection. . . . It was found also that Mr. Mason's affairs were in hopeless confusion, and there remained nothing for his daughter but a small annuity which had been left to her by her godfather.

Captain Lindsay sold out of the army and

took his wife abroad, declaring that he never wished to return to Great Britain. He could not reconcile himself to poverty; and a specious speculation tempted him, in spite of his wife's entreaties, to embark in it his little fortune. An appearance of success rendered him elated and happy, and even seemed to restore all the charms that had first captivated Clara. But—

> Violets plucked, the sweetest showers
> Will ne'er make grow again—

and no outward fascination could ever rekindle again the old reverential love. There remained, however, the sense of duty and the remembrance of love *freely* promised. . . . Well had Madame de Bussy followed the Comte de Maistre's teaching in educating Clara *comme femme*, and she never forgot that her duty was to render happy, as far

as she could, him whom she herself had chosen.

When therefore the short-lived promise of fortune changed into the certainty of complete failure, and the darker and weaker traits of her husband's character re-appeared, she remained unchanged, and her sole thought seemed to be how to make their modest little home in Rennes — where they had sought economy and retirement—bright and pleasing to him. At Rennes were born Charles and Mildred Lindsay, and their early childhood was, perhaps, the happiest time of Clara's life, for as soon as they grew up to boy and girl-hood, began the wearing anxiety about their future. The whole family depended for support on her annuity, which barely sufficed for their daily wants and the education of the children. Her husband fancied, indeed, that

he could provide for them all some day, by means of a work which he intended to write on the subject of military engineering, and he spent the greater part of his time in collecting materials for his purpose.

When Charles had reached the age of seventeen he besought his father to grant the request which he had made less directly a year before—that he would send him to England and endeavour to place him in some mercantile establishment where he might learn to become a man of business ; but his father proudly answered that none of his lineage had ever descended to trade, that the army, literature, or one of the learned professions was the only career possible for a Lindsay. Charles ventured to recall the fact that without his mother's little income, originally derived from trade, they would all be

beggars. Hot words ensued, Mr. Lindsay declared that he would disown his son if he ever dared to mix up his name with that of traders in the country where his forefathers had ranked among the great ones of the land.

Charles bitterly resented these words, for his mother's sake, and vowed in his own heart that he would not remain a burden to her any longer, and would seek his fortune in distant lands where the boasted name of Lindsay was no more known or honoured than the name of Mason. Through the interest of a college friend he secretly obtained a free passage to Australia, and left his home one day, on the plea of going to see a naval review at Cherbourg. The day of his expected return arrived, and on the same evening Mrs. Lindsay received a letter

of fond farewell, telling her that her son had exiled himself in the hope of coming back in a few years able to surround his parents' declining days with every comfort, and to make his dear sister as rich as she was fair; but that they must not expect him to write until he could announce his own success. He promised, however, to make such arrangements that, were he to be seriously ill, or to die, they should be duly informed, therefore as long as no news was received *of* him, they were to be assured that he was well in health, and the first news *from* him would be the glad intelligence that he had gained that for which he had condemned himself to the pain of separation from all whom he loved.

Poor Mrs. Lindsay never quite recovered this shock. She knew that her husband's

pride and harshness to the boy had been the cause of it; yet during the five subsequent years that Mr. Lindsay lived she strove to hide the sorrow that was undermining her already delicate health. The reward, however, was given to her to hear from his dying lips that she had been the one bright gleam shining through all the darkness of his life, and that if he could live it over again, he would not hesitate in his choice between her and any earthly treasure. He confided to her his precious MS., desiring her to give it whenever she could do so with her own hand to a certain great publisher in London, whom he had known in his youth, and who he hoped would publish it and look after her interest in the matter as well as his own. He also wished them to go on to Edinburgh in order that Mildred might be introduced

to his connections there. 'The ruling passion is strong in death,'—he evidently could not bear that his daughter should receive protection or assistance from any save her equals in birth on his side.

For nearly a year after his death Mrs. Lindsay lingered at Rennes yearning for a line from her beloved son, of whom, in spite of every effort, they had never been able to find any trace; her only consolation was his positive assurance that if they did not hear of him that silence was a pledge of his good health. At length, warned by her own increasing debility, she felt that she must delay no longer to take Mildred to Edinburgh as her father had desired, but, as we have learned from Joseph, it was ordained that she should never leave London.

The little sum which they had been able

to save for the journey during the last ten months was soon exhausted by the expenses of Mrs. Lindsay's illness, and Mildred was only too grateful when she found a shop where they consented to purchase her exquisite work for less than half its value, and thus enable her to give her darling patient some few luxuries which were out of the reach of their income. She could, perhaps, have earned more by giving lessons in French, had she been able to go out for some hours in the day; but, as this was impossible, she worked on untiringly, persuading herself that the advancing summer would restore her mother.

To keep her own suffering out of sight and to endeavour to make everyone happy around her was, as she had been taught by the noblest example, a woman's special

mission in the world ; and therefore, although, with her quick temperament, she could not have reached the age of two-and-twenty without knowing something of that ardent longing for a fuller life which renders the monotony of an existence like her's more difficult to bear even than acute pain, she seemed—at least in her mother's presence—cheerful and gay, even in that poor London lodging, overshadowed by the terror of losing the dearest object of her affections.

Within the last few weeks that terror had begun to grow more positive, and she ceased to question Dr. Bertram as she used to do so eagerly in the beginning. It was as if she did not wish to have the last ray of hope taken from her by calling forth the fatal sentence. And when at last she heard it from her mother's own lips, it seemed to her

that she could bear it better thus than from a stranger.

Poor Mrs. Lindsay had failed to get her late husband's MS. accepted, and had received no answers to the letters which she had written to Mr. Lindsay's connections in Scotland when she first began to fear that she would never reach Edinburgh. The thought then of leaving Mildred without money or friends in the great world of London well nigh filled her with despair; could she even live for one month longer the next payment of her annuity would have become due, and would, at least, give Mildred sufficient to return to Rennes, where she could have the protection of their faithful old servant's humble home, and the probability of being able to support herself by giving lessons. Even this consolation was

to be denied to her, and it was in the bitter hopelessness of that feeling that she had resolved to tell Dr. Bertram what their position was, and ask for his help to obtain for her poor child a situation as governess in England.

Joseph answered to the effect that no doubt it would be much more advantageous for Miss Lindsay to find a home in a good English family, than to bury all her gifts of mind and person in a small foreign town; and he promised to speak to his cousin, Lady Maud Meredith, about her. Mrs. Lindsay saw that he really meant to help Mildred, and in her inmost heart she blessed him for his goodness, being quite unconscious that he was thinking far more of himself and Lady Maud in the matter, than of her daughter. She then gave him two or three

references to persons residing at Rennes, and begged him to apply to them in order that she, herself, might feel he was justified in recommending Mildred to his friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

The finest nature, like the truest steel, must be tempered in the hottest furnace; so much caloric would be thrown away on an inferior metal. Capacity for suffering infers also capacity for achievements.—WHITE MELVILLE.

FOR form's sake Joseph wrote to one of those whom Mrs. Lindsay had named as references at Rennes. When he received the answer he took it to Maud, who was already much pleased with all that he had told her of the Lindsays. She asked him to make an appointment for her to see them at any time that would suit his patient.

The interview was finally fixed for five o'clock on the following day. When the servant announced Lady Maud Meredith,

Mildred was standing with her head half turned away from the door, and holding in one hand a bunch of grapes from which she was choosing the largest and ripest for her mother, who lay upon the sofa beside her.

The sun shone upon her wavy light brown hair, tinging it with a bright red shade, and rendering more marked the contrast of her dark eye-lashes and delicately-fair complexion. She was not nearly so tall as Maud, and her slight graceful figure had none of the commanding dignity of her ladyship's. Maud could not fail to be noticed in any assembly, however distinguished. Mildred's appearance seemed more in harmony with the comparison which has been made of a woman's power to that of an angel-guardian: 'She may lead the world, but by remaining like him invisible.'

Mildred left Lady Maud with her mother; she had not sufficient strength to remain to hear plans made for the time when she would be alone in the world—a time about which she felt hopelessly indifferent.

When their visitor had gone she returned to the sitting-room, but the forced calmness with which she listened to all the arrangements that had been made for her as governess to Lady Maud's children did not deceive Mrs. Lindsay, and feeling that her last hour was indeed at hand, she gave Mildred Charles's farewell letter, and pointed to the concluding lines—

'The hope of returning and making the old home bright and happy will preserve me from all rashness and needless exposure to danger. You must not fail me then, you will take care of yourselves for my sake;

and tell my sweet Milly she must grow prettier and prettier, so that I may be prouder than ever of her.'

'You will soon be the only one remaining, my child,' whispered her mother, 'to reward him for his voluntary exile; you will not allow sorrow and trouble to render you careless about yourself, you will not cause him the grief of finding on his return, that "some are dead and some are changed" of those whom he loved; Milly, you will not fail him!' . . . .

CHAPTER XIV.

I prefer much, when it is possible, to be generous first and then just.—DR. NEWMAN.

ALFRED happened to be in the drawing-room when a note came from Joseph some days afterwards to announce Mrs. Lindsay's death.

'Of course Miss Lindsay will want money,' said Maud, 'so I will send her the quarter's salary in advance.'

'Send her a whole year's salary,' interrupted Alfred, who had heard her history. 'It is sad enough, surely, for a young girl to lose her mother without being compelled to think of every penny that might possibly be

saved even in paying the last tributes to the dead! What would a quarter's salary be to Miss Lindsay at such a moment?'

'With care it would be sufficient to defray all *necessary* expenses, unless there are debts, and we are certainly not called upon to pay these. It is surely more than justice demands to send her what I have said, without having waited to be asked for the advance.'

'To give only when one is asked is very often but to give too late. Send the poor girl a hundred pounds.'

'Indeed I can afford no such thing, nor is it at all due from me!'

'Why I have seen your name for fifty pounds in lists for building churches, and public charities, whose objects are utter strangers to you!'

'Yes, such things are among the duties of my position; but in this case neither duty nor justice demands my aid, beyond what I have proposed to do. If Miss Lindsay leaves us she will of course seek another situation and will receive her salary from it.'

'We will forget duty and justice in the pleasure of being generous. In the outburst of her grief let us at least spare her all anxiety about money.'

Alfred went to the table and wrote a cheque which he handed to his wife with a smile. 'Send that to Miss Lindsay, Maud, I do not support so many charities as you do.'

'You have mistaken me, Alfred. If I thought it right to send the year's salary, I should do so without regard to my own convenience. It is the principle I dislike of

giving money which is supposed to be earned but has not been earned.'

'Hang the principle,' he said, half jestingly, but with evident determination to have his own way in the matter. 'There, Maud, that will do; and now I am going to ring for a servant to take the letter.'

He had put the cheque into an envelope addressed to Miss Lindsay, and written in the inside 'With Captain and Lady Maud Meredith's sincere condolence and kind regards.'

Alfred very rarely interposed with Maud's wishes in any way, it was so much *easier* to avoid all contest, yet an unusual circumstance if quite unconnected with his own pleasure or happiness, as in the present case, would sometimes rouse him to exert his authority; and the quiet manner in which he set aside

Maud's opinions on such occasions was very trying to her. The habit of good breeding however, saved her from ever yielding to ill-temper at the time, and afterwards she consoled herself with the thought that he did not attempt to discuss her opinions, or even her principles, because he could not appreciate them.

A few days afterwards Alfred attended Mrs. Lindsay's funeral as well as Dr. Bertram, although the most that might have been expected from him and Lady Maud was to send their carriage, and his attention in following the beloved remains himself to the grave added to the debt of gratitude already registered in Mildred's heart towards them for the pecuniary aid which their generosity had afforded her. In both instances they had done more than could

have been considered due to her, even under her peculiar circumstances, and so in proportion did her desire to give them satisfaction exceed that which the sense of justice would have prompted—the desire to discharge generously the duties for which she had received payment.

Alfred had left town when Mildred entered upon her duties of governess. He had gone to Ireland to enjoy his favourite summer sport of fishing, so that Mildred had time to become acquainted with her pupils and Lady Maud before meeting him for the first time at Chiltern Park. The children talked a great deal of 'papa' and seemed to dote upon him, but her Ladyship seldom spoke of him, and Mildred began to wonder at his prolonged absence. Could any serpent have crept into such an Eden as life

seemed to have prepared for the Merediths? They were both young and handsome, they had lovely children, and wealth enough to gratify every wish!

One day, early in August, Joseph arrived from London, and when he told Maud that his discovery had been approved, and would henceforth mark a step in the history of science, her delight and pride were perhaps the rewards of his long toil that he valued most. She desired a half-holiday to be given to the children to celebrate their cousin's arrival and success. They were also to be allowed the treat of taking tea out of doors at five o'clock with Mamma and Cousin Joseph.

Along the back of the house there ran a colonnade filled with evergreens and flowers, from which a broad flight of stone steps

led down to a part of the grounds called the valley, through which flowed a mountain rivulet, making many an eddy as it rushed along its rocky bed; and the surrounding woods, breaking here and there into dells and glades, stretched away on either side until they seemed to touch the distant gorse-covered hills. Besides the pleasant shade a fresh breeze from the sea and mountains rendered this retreat delightful in the hot summer weather, and it was upon the grassy banks of the rivulet, under a natural awning formed by the interlaced branches of two gigantic oaks standing at some distance from each other, that the tea-feast was spread. . . . The children, tired at last even of eating raspberries and cream, had wandered to a little distance busily gathering the wild flowers and ferns which grew close to the

water's edge. The elders of the party had also left the table and had seated themselves on the moss-covered mound which surrounded the base of one of the oak trees. Mildred was working, and upon Maud's knees rested a large album of illustrations from the Baron De la Motte Fouqué's weird story of 'Sintram,' which Joseph had brought from London. She was speaking with animation of Folko de Montfaucon, in that scene of the bear-hunt where he so nearly lost his life, and condemning Sintram.

'Do you not then think Sintram's self-conquest grand, Lady Maud—more so than anything that the story relates of the great and good Folko, whom no storm of passion ever seemed to touch?' said Mildred suddenly, raising her soft violet eyes and meeting Maud's bright proud glance.

'No, indeed,' she replied; 'surely the virtue which is above temptation is more admirable than the virtue which wavers before it, even for a time! Sintram only did what was right, and what, left undone, would have made him something like a murderer. Where was the grandeur of such an act of manifest duty?'

'Only think of what Sintram was, and how he was tried! The treasure which had revealed to the fierce untamed youth a new world of light and joy, belonged to Folko, and when Folko fell from the top of the glacier through no real fault of Sintram's, was it not natural that wild delight at the thought of the happiness which Folko's death would render possible to him should for the moment overpower the whispers of conscience? And was there no heroism in so conquering that

weakness as to hasten down the glaciers heedless of all danger to himself, and rescue the fallen knight whom no other human power could have saved, thus raising with his own hands the barrier between himself and the passionately-coveted happiness ?—'

'Papa! papa! there is papa!' interrupted the children with a cry of joy, as they ran by them towards the house.

Alfred had come home unexpectedly as usual; he never took the trouble of announcing his return beforehand, and for a few minutes before the little sharp eyes had espied him at the end of the colonnade steps he had been standing there gazing at the scene beneath—the woods and glades with the evening rose-tinted haze gathering over them, the children at play beside the river, and their still beautiful mother seated at a

little distance from them. They all belonged to him, yet with a bitter pang he felt that his coming would mar rather than increase the harmony of the scene, to her to whom it should have been the greatest pleasure. The brightness of her countenance was heightened by no expectation of his return, and his eyes wandered to Joseph as he was holding one side of the book which rested upon her knees. From him he turned to look at the new governess, just at the moment when her defence of Sintram had brought a rich glow to her usually pale cheeks.

The fair speakers knew not how much or how eagerly they were observed by another as well as by Joseph, who, as Maud stood up and advanced to meet her husband, murmured to his own thoughts :

'Virtue which is above temptation can only be the result of coldness of nature, incapacity to be attracted by anything, or of a strong will in bondage to some particular form of what they call religion, and concentrated on the point of fulfilling all the duties prescribed by it. Folko's advocate does not then possess it. She is not incapable of ardour, and certainly is not satisfied with fulfilling the prescribed duties of a wife to one who does not satisfy her mind and heart. . . . She will know herself better some day!'

Meanwhile Maud had met her husband, who slightly touched her forehead with his lips, and after a few minutes conversation he walked back with her, whilst the children hung about him clamouring for notice.

As they came near the oak tree where Joseph and Mildred had remained, Alfred

advanced a little before Maud, in order, perhaps, to avoid a formal introduction.

'Come little ones, present me to your friend who is good enough to take charge of unruly wee creatures like yourselves,' he said, raising his hat and giving Mildred his hand. 'Their looks and words have already told me how happy you make them, Miss Lindsay. Such watchful care, and at a time so full of sorrow, renders us doubly indebted to you.'

'It is only through them that I can thank you and Lady Maud for all your kindness,' answered Mildred, in a low faltering voice, and stooping to pat the handsome retriever that had followed his master from the yard, emboldened by delight at his return even to steal through the house, which was forbidden ground to poor Nap.

CHAPTER XV.

To bless is to be blest.—ROGERS.

MAUD'S pride never suffered her to accept credit for any act that was not in the fullest sense her own; so, when Mildred, on coming to them, thanked her for her great generosity, she disclaimed all right to gratitude on that account.

'You must thank my husband, not me, Miss Lindsay,' she said, 'it was altogether his thought. He is much more inclined to overlook rule and system, and to act from impulse than I am. He remembered only that it might be convenient for you to receive the whole sum at once, and would not con-

sider that perhaps you yourself, when you came to know us, would not wish to remain beyond the time of trial for which our engagement had been made.'

Mildred could make no answer to this, but she felt how much the trustfulness, which such an act of impulse implied, merited from her. She therefore struggled more earnestly than ever against her own deep depression, and endeavoured to make herself as much as possible a companion even to such young children, so that not their improvement only, but their bright faces also, might show that the trust had not been misplaced. Their father's words of greeting were then very sweet to her.

Having spent all her early life abroad she was free from the conventional stiffness, so often produced by the sense of mortification,

that generally attaches itself to poverty in England; and, as her naturally buoyant spirits, aided by the effort to conquer her sadness for the sake of others, became less and less forced, they seemed to brighten everyone around her.

Maud's manner to her husband—so unlike the example that Mildred had seen at home, where there was real superiority on the wife's part—amazed her at first, and she wondered if self-righteousness were an especial mark of Catholicity; but with her usual tendency to excuse, she tried to believe that there must be some mistake, some misunderstanding influencing Maud, in regard to her husband, and she thought the best way to remove it was to strive always to draw out all the most pleasing traits of each before the other. She succeeded so far that Alfred began to fancy

Maud was growing more like the ideal he had worshipped in his early youth, and persuaded himself that the want of a suitable companion of her own sex had hitherto prevented the development of her gentler qualities.

Thus, unconsciously to herself, the great object of Mildred's life became the hope of seeing Alfred as happy as she felt that one so generous, so open-hearted, deserved to be; and, as it never occurred to her that this could be done save through Maud, all her efforts were devoted to render his tastes attractive to her by placing them in such a light as to gratify her vanity. When Joseph came at Christmas he saw all this with little pleasure, but he also saw that, without the glamour shed over it by the enchantress who so quietly kept in the background, the whole of the fair fabric would vanish in a moment.

'So Alfred is half persuaded that he and Maud are falling back into love with each other!' mused Joseph one night when he had reached his bedroom, after spending the last hour with Alfred in the smoking-room, and having gleaned from his conversation that he was beginning to indulge in day-dreams again. 'I could tell him whom he is falling in love with, and whose every thought is occupied about him, although she does not understand her own feelings, and is always working to make his wife please him. It is a very pretty little romance. Mildred must remain here in all her blissful unconciousness until the year is finished, and then she must go, in order that they may both learn what each has been to the other; whilst my queenly sleeping beauty remains to be roused by me at the fitting time. . . . I

wonder if, in days to come, they will ever think of their conversation about Folko and Sintram, and how much either of them will resemble her hero! If Maud be like what she proposed to admire in Folko, then her beauty has only been a snare, and she has not been worth half the passion that will have been wasted upon her; and if Mildred, with her soft clinging nature, be like Sintram in his victory over what they call temptation, it would be sublime, were it not silly to sacrifice so much to empty fables. . . . Meanwhile I must take care that the fair Maud does not grow too amiable, and encourage Alfred in his mistake as to the real object of his awakening love.'

At mid-day the children were set free from the schoolroom for recreation before their dinner at half past one, and their great delight

in fine weather was to mount their little Shetland ponies and take a gallop in the park, attended by the faithful old groom who had been in the service of the Meredith family from his boyhood—and at this time Mildred generally joined Maud in the drawing-room. One day, as she entered, she found Joseph there, unrolling some music.

'I am so glad you have come Miss Lindsay,' said Maud; 'Joseph has just received a selection of Beethoven's sacred songs which he has lately heard, and which he fancies will suit me. I have been wishing for your help. Shall we try them together?'

'With pleasure!' answered Mildred, seating herself at the piano.

Shortly afterwards Alfred came in, and he noticed that Mildred looked a little tired.

'Do you like this kind of music, Miss

Lindsay?' he asked, as Maud turned to seek for some particular song in the pile of music beside her.

'Yes, at times and seasons,' she replied, but I should not desire it every day; I prefer some familar melody of my own bonnie land, or Lady Maud's. I could never hear her sing "Auld Robin Gray" too often, but—'

'Does Maud sing "Auld Robin Gray"?' interrupted Alfred. 'I have never heard it sung by her, and I am so fond of it!'

'Perhaps that is the reason why her Ladyship took the trouble of learning, only a few days ago, a song so difficult in its own way.'

'Will you sing it for me?' asked Alfred, looking up at his wife.

'Yes, if you like!' . . .

'Thank you, Maud! It has been such a treat!' he said, as the last notes died away.

'Where did you stumble upon so ancient a friend ?' said Joseph, carelessly.

'In one of Miss Lindsay's music-books, and something that she said of it inspired me with the desire to learn it.'

Joseph inwardly congratulated himself as he observed Alfred's quick glance towards Mildred, who still sat at the piano with her hands resting upon the keys.

'One spark is enough to fire a long train of gunpowder,' he said to himself, 'Master Alfred will never again be likely to mistake the source of the new charm which he had begun to find in his home.'

Joseph judged rightly ; from that day forth Alfred saw clearly who the bright fairy was, that unseen, had tried to bestow the gift of happiness through her whose privilege and duty it was to give it ; but who knew not

how to prize her privilege, and who forgot her duty.

'When,' wrote the Comte de Maistre, to a friend remarkable for enthusiasm and devotedness—'When, amidst the chilling indifference of icy egotism, and something still worse, one meets a soul like yours, he breathes freely, and is comforted—like a traveller across the deserts of Arabia, who suddenly lights upon a grove and a limpid spring, he sits down under the shade and drinks.'

So did Alfred. A fountain had suddenly sprung up in his desert home, and he sat down by it and drank, without pausing to consider whether, as he could not always rest there, a draught of its fresh waters would but increase his thirst during the rest of his journey. He was content to enjoy the present and

take no thought for the future, yet at times he told himself that Maud would not fail at length to become what Mildred had well nigh succeeded in making her appear to be, and that, therefore, even were some untoward fate to deprive them of their good genius, all the brightness that her presence had brought among them would not vanish with her. He knew not, or perhaps he did not wish to know, that Maud could never now grow so beautiful in his sight as Mildred appeared.

Unknown to himself, the ideal that he had loved in his boyhood and attributed to Maud was for the first time realised in Mildred, whose eager sunny temperament was always at work, trying to devise some pleasure for those whom she liked, and always ready to enjoy every pastime without a thought of whether or not it was worthy of her attention.

In this way she ruled the children with a light yet firm hand; making herself as much a companion to them in their hours of recreation as she was a mistress at other times; and they obeyed her with willing submission, such as they had never before shown, even towards their mother, whom, nevertheless, they feared far more than Miss Lindsay. And time sped on all too swiftly for Mildred also, she was so happy in the thought of being able to repay all Alfred's goodness to her when an unknown stranger, and no envious spirit had revealed to her the secret that she would be happy as long as she could work for his happiness, and no longer.

CHAPTER XVI.

Forlorn of thee,
Whither shall I betake me? where subsist?
MILTON.

THE early spring had come with its fragrant flowers and balmy breezes, and on an April day, just before the children's dinner, Maud and Mildred were returning by the valley from the village where they had gone to see a poor sick woman. The children had accompanied them on their ponies, and had lingered behind so as to have a good gallop towards the house; and as the ladies passed close to the oak trees where they had enjoyed the little feast in honour of Joseph's

success last summer, Alfred met them with some letters in his hand.

'The mid-day post has just come in,' he said; 'here is a whole packet of letters for your Ladyship, and a foreign one for you, Mademoiselle Mildred.'

He sometimes called her thus in jest, declaring that she was only half a Briton.

'I must go home and see if any of these letters require an immediate answer, as I shall have very little time after luncheon before we start for the croquet-party,' said Maud, hastening on.

'*Oh! quel bonheur!* . . . It is from Charles,' exclaimed Mildred, as she glanced at the first lines of her letter.

She had forgotten that Alfred was still standing where Maud had left them, and, letting the envelope fall she read on eagerly,

until, blinded by tears of joy, she could see no more, and sitting down on the mound beside her, she covered her face with her hands.

Alfred felt that he ought to leave her to enjoy her brother's letter alone, but an irresistible power seemed to chain him to the spot where he stood. He knew what Charles had said, that they should not hear from him unless he were coming home a successful man, or to bid them farewell for ever in this world. Had it been such a farewell Mildred would not have exclaimed '*Quel bonheur!*' and Alfred shrank from accepting the other supposition.

The sound of the children's voices as they galloped up to their father roused Mildred.

'Forgive me, Captain Meredith,' she said, raising her eyes all sparkling even through the tears that filled them and glistened

upon her glowing cheeks. 'I had forgotten that you were here—forgotten everything save that my dear brother is coming home successful beyond his brightest expectations, and full of the happiness that he is to give to our dear mother. . . .'

Again Mildred turned away, had she looked for one moment longer the sudden expression of dismay which Alfred had been unable to control would probably have been as a revelation to her.

'With these little ones around me, Miss Lindsay,' he replied at length, 'I cannot congratulate you as I ought; this great joy to you will cause them an irreparable loss; your brother will rob them of you, and what will they do without you?'

The ring of his voice might have told her that 'they' meant more than the children,

had she not been startled by the pang which darted through her own heart as the idea of leaving the Merediths was thus brought before her.

Eddy, an impulsive boy of about five years old, who had taken a wild fancy to Mildred from the first day, when he had said after gravely surveying her: 'I like yoo because yoo so pretty; yoo's got hair that s'ines like my goldy fish,' leaped from his pony and ran up to her, twining his arms round her waist.

'We not let anybody rob yoo.'

Mildred rested her head upon the child's shoulder and drew him still closer to her.

'Yoo not go, yoo not go,' persisted the little fellow, stroking her hair which so excited his admiration. 'Yoo not stopped lovin' Eddy?

'My darling, no!' murmured Mildred, strangely perplexed at her own sensations. What meant that aching pain at the thought of going even to her brother's home? Had these children become dearer to her than Charles, for whose return she had so longed and prayed?

'Come, Eddy, the only place that I am going to for the present is to the croquet-party,' she added with an effort; 'and if we don't hurry in and get ready in time for dinner, Mamma will be angry, and then no little people will be taken to see the playing.'

She put away the letter, and clasping the tiny hand closely in her own she stood up and moved away without looking at Alfred, who, however, came and walked beside her back to the house leading Eddy's pony, and

the two elder children followed looking sad and puzzled.

Charles had said he would probably reach Rennes a few days after his letter, so that there was only time to send an answer there ready to meet him. Even Maud had said she hoped Mr. Lindsay would come to Chiltern Park, and Alfred seconded this plan so warmly that Mildred was obliged to tell her brother that, in the hope of his accepting their invitation, they would not allow her to start for Rennes, as she wished, without waiting to hear from him again. In reply came a telegram to say that he would come as quickly as possible.

Maud had always treated Mildred with perfect courtesy, and, as belonging to the same social class as themselves, had made a companion of her in a manner that she would

never have shown towards her predecessor; therefore, although it was evident that she only acted thus from the consideration of what was strictly due to a highly-born gentlewoman reduced to earn her bread, there was no awkwardness, no need for any change of manner when the news arrived that Charles Lindsay had returned a rich man. In all their intercourse Maud had been actuated by a sense of justice which Mildred had fully recognised, and given in return what that justice merited, namely, respect; but it would have caused her no regret to leave Lady Maud, and during the days that intervened between Charles's letter and his arrival in England, she began to learn how immeasurable is the difference between the feelings inspired by those who are just and those who are generous towards us.

Her brother had not said exactly on what day he should arrive, and the uncertainty added to her excitement. The extremes of joy and sadness seemed to meet in the thought of their re-union; the very greatness of the joy re-awakened in all its first bitterness her grief for her mother, whose delight would have been Charles's dearest reward for all his toils, and Mildred begged to be allowed to continue the children's lessons, finding in that occupation a kind of rest from her own agitation. One morning, as she was thus occupied, a maid came to say that Lady Maud wished to see her in the boudoir.

Mildred's heart gave a loud throb—had Charles arrived?

Yes, he had arrived, and Maud had sent

for her in order to prepare her a little for the meeting. Alfred and herself had already received him, but they had now left him alone in the library to wait for his sister. . . .

CHAPTER XVII.

Il est certain que cet enfant voudra passionnément ce qu'elle voudra; mais tant mieux si elle veut le bien.—OCTAVE FEUILLET.

CHARLES LINDSAY arrived at Chiltern Park on a Wednesday, and the Merediths insisted that he should remain at least until the Monday following. He longed to take Mildred away at once, and to be freed from the restraint of being with persons whom he knew so slightly, but, rather than appear ungracious towards those who had been kind to her, he acceded to their wishes.

The shock of finding his parents—especially his mother—no more, had been very

severe; and the only dear one left to him became doubly dear. He watched her every movement with a loving admiration that amused Maud, and made Alfred envy him his brother's right.

'I declare you are like a lover about your sister, Mr. Lindsay,' Maud said one day, as Mildred left the room and Charles's eyes followed her to the door.

'You would not wonder at it, Lady Maud,' he replied, 'could you have experienced what it is to be tossed about among strangers and rough associates, as I have been for years, and then return to find such a sister as Milly. Her brightness, and her soft gentle ways have, to a man like me, the effect of genial sunshine after exposure to an angry storm. But do not suppose that I am silly enough to fancy she is perfect. I can perceive already

that she would cling closely to anything whatever she had once learned to love or reverence, and would not willingly see that it was faulty or untrue. I see also that she has no prudence, no thought of what would or would not tend to her own happiness, would ever help to guide her through the difficulties of life. Now I hope they are all nearly planed away for her. I have met beautiful women in my wanderings, and Milly is certainly not what would be called a beauty yet in feminine grace of person and mind she seems more than a rival to anyone I have yet seen abroad or at home.'

Maud smiled, but her opinion of Mr. Lindsay's appreciation was not raised; nevertheless the originality of his conversation, and the stories of so adventurous a life amused her, and made the time pass

pleasantly. The only cloud that darkened it for Mildred gathered on Sunday morning when she came down dressed for going to church.

'Yes, as far as the door,' Charles said, when she asked him if he were ready to accompany her.

'For shame, Charley! Has money-seeking, then, driven away all your faith in nobler things?'

'No, indeed! In the search for fortune I found a more priceless treasure. My faith has not been lost, or even lessened, but greatly increased. . . . I have learned to believe in Lady Maud's divine faith from one who might have been the model for your old favourite—the saintly missionary in Chateaubriand's "Atala."'

'And you have forsworn our mother's

teaching?' murmured Mildred, as the smile vanished from her lips. 'How good God was to take her before she had the pain of hearing this.'

'Now *you* are cruel, Milly; although perhaps unwittingly. Our mother knows now that I have forsworn none of her teaching, none! It has but been enlarged and completed. All that she taught me to believe I still believe, but with greater faith and love; and I have learned to receive as divine truth what had been withheld from her, or contradicted by human and insufficient authority.'

'Are you not deceiving yourself, Charles, about Lady Maud's religion? . . . Are pride and self-righteousness marks of "greater faith and love"? Which was the higher being, think you, Lady Maud or our mother?'

'Those who respond generously to a partial knowledge of good are far above those who know their Master's will and do it not. "The greater the circle of light," you know, "the greater the boundary of darkness by which it is surrounded." . . . I venerate your faithfulness to the light you have received, and yet I hope and pray that you too will some day see that the religion which men have endeavoured to reform, is God's all-divine and unerring Truth; as far above the reach of reform as heaven is above earth. It would indeed be a poor religion in which the scholar could be equal to the Master!'

'You would blind me and yourself to the sad truth that you have been caught by the showy forms of that faith which we saw around us in our childhood, and for which

you have abandoned the purer and simpler worship taught us by our parents. . . The hope of your return used to be one of the silent joys of my life, and now the fulfilment of that hope brings with it bitter sorrow. O why have you so marred my joy?'

The last word was barely audible as she left his arm and turned into the church path—which they had now reached—with irrepressible emotion. The reaction was so great after the excessive joyousness to which she had yielded without restraint during the two or three previous days, pushing aside as an intrusion all remembrance of the strange pang which the first thought of leaving Chiltern Park had caused her.

Charles's visible dismay at the effect of his disclosure helped, however, to calm her more than anything else; she could not bear to

be the cause of distress to anyone, much less to so affectionate a brother, and in the afternoon she succeeded to a certain degree in concealing her depression. On the following day, also, she said farewell to her friends and her dear little pupils with tolerable composure. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII.

Le plaisir le plus délicat est de faire celui d'autrui.—LA BRUYÈRE.

THE Merediths followed them to London in a few weeks, as the season was about to begin, and Alfred, in the character of cicerone to Charles, to whom he had taken a great fancy, was very much with them. Maud was also gracious in presenting Mildred at Court, and in society; pleased to have in her charge so pretty a girl, yet one whose beauty could never clash with her own, although at every turn admiring glances met Mildred, and the slightly foreign viva-

city of her manner riveted the charm first excited by her appearance.

She seemed to enjoy all the pleasures that surrounded her, yet no suitor, however devoted, was able to obtain any special favour in her eyes, and Joseph smiled to himself, when he heard it assigned as a cause of her indifference that she was too much carried away by enjoyment to become deeply attached to anyone, or to like the prospect of settling down into a staid English matron.

'In Charles Lindsay, Alfred has found a friend who suits him to perfection,' Maud said to Joseph one evening, as they stood together in a ball-room whilst Alfred had gone to enquire if the carriage had come for them. 'I have not known him to spend so much time in London for many years.'

'And what do you suppose is Lindsay's particular attraction for him?' asked Joseph, amused by Maud's overlooking of Mildred in the matter.

'I fancy it is his great knowledge and love of every kind of sport, which no doubt he has acquired from the sort of Arab life he has led. Alfred is trying to induce him to go to Ireland on a fishing expedition this summer, the only obstacle to this plan is Lindsay's dislike to leave his sister, of whom he makes such a pet.'

'Why not take her with them? She is not one of those to whom more intellectual companionship than that of two men in love with their sport is absolutely necessary. I am sure she would be amused and even interested.'

'Of course she would; anyone, a child

whom she is fond of, amuses and interests her; and you see how perfectly satisfied she is with all this gay trifling?'

Just then Mildred returned, and taking her partner's arm, she dismissed him with that smiling grace of manner which was the cause of despair to her admirers.

'Are you tired, Miss Lindsay?' asked Joseph, watching the restless movement of her hands as she played with her fan. 'Have these scenes lost their brilliancy for you with their novelty?'

'No, but I sometimes find the brilliancy like glare without genial warmth; then I grow tired, and visions of green fields, trees, and sparkling streamlets seem to mock at me for my folly in remaining shut up in a town at this time of the year.'

'Then the valley of Chiltern Park would

have more charm for you even than these ball-rooms with all their gaiety?'

'It is profanation even to suppose a possible comparison between them.'

'But you have here what the valley would not give you, and what you by no means seem altogether to despise—admirers.'

'The valley could give me one who is worth all that I have met with in London.' laughed Mildred. 'Eddy has no rival in my favours. Besides, a beautiful country scene needs no such accessories.'

'If beauty of country is all you desire, why do you not induce your brother to take you to Ireland? Lady Maud has just told me that Meredith has asked him to go there on a fishing tour—there are some lovely spots on the banks of the Shannon.'

'How much I should like it!' exclaimed

Mildred. 'Charles is obdurate however, and is determined to sacrifice his own pleasure and mine to that supreme bore, conventionality. He says he should not like me to be the only lady of the party.'

'Why I fancied he was so fond of you that you could always persuade him to give you your own way,' said Maud.

'Well, perhaps I could, but it would mar a pleasure if it were obtained by persuading others to do what they dislike! If you would come, Lady Maud, it would be delightful. Charles would be so pleased, and what a glad surprise it would give to Captain Meredith! . . . Do come!'

Maud laughed at Mildred's eagerness, yet she was slightly annoyed at the—as it appeared to her—disregard of what *her* wishes on the subject would be.

'You plead earnestly for everybody's pleasure save mine, which, I suppose, you think ought to be ignored altogether.'

'No, indeed. I believe I was allotting to you the best part.'

'The carriage is waiting, Maud, so if you like you can go home, now,' said Alfred, suddenly appearing; 'Lindsay said he would wait in the cloak-room for his sister.'

Joseph gave Maud his arm, and Alfred followed with Mildred.

'What was the best part you were allotting to Lady Maud just now?' he asked with a smile.

'You know the usual fate of unexpected hearers of conversation among their friends,' she answered lightly; 'and if you have escaped it by only coming in time to hear that last remark of mine you ought to be very thankful, and not ask for explanations.'

'You shall not play me off so easily. I am sure you were not talking of me, but, if you will not tell me what was the subject of your conversation, I shall be forced to think it was something very wicked.'

'Well, I suppose I must not lead you to commit a sin of rash judgment,' Mildred said, fearing that any appearance of mystery might really look strange. 'I was trying to induce Lady Maud to join in your proposed tour; Charles would then like to take me, and all would be pleased; naturally I considered that the one who had the power of giving to each and all this pleasure, would have the largest share in it.'

'Beings of a higher order do not judge ordinary mortals by their own feelings; follow their example, Miss Lindsay, or disappointment will meet you at every turn.'

His words, and the abrupt change from his hitherto jesting tone and manner made Mildred blush; and, feeling that she blushed rendered her angry with herself, and gave a still deeper tinge to her heightened colour.

They had reached the entrance of the cloak-room, where they found Charles Lindsay waiting, and having wished the Merediths good-night, he hurried Mildred away to their carriage; a vague dread seemed to haunt him lest any severe cold should develop in Mildred the fatal disease of which their mother had died, and he could not bear to see her exposed to draughts or night air.

CHAPTER XIX.

Thoughts, from the tongue that slowly part,
Glance quick as lightning through the heart.
SCOTT.

ON the following day Mildred received a letter from a dear school companion lately married, and who had just returned from her bridal tour to settle at her husband's château near Dinant; she wrote to remind Mildred of their girlish engagement that whichever of them first became her own mistress should have the right to claim a long visit from her chosen friend.

'Now, Charles, you can go to Ireland without any regret on my account,' Mildred

said, handing him the letter; 'you know I shall enjoy seeing Clotilde again, and you can take me as far as Rennes, where I shall pick up dear old Jeannette.'

'Jeannette could join us here, as we had already thought of, and I know you would rather come to Ireland, just as well as I know that I would rather have you go with me; yesterday you were full of the hope that Lady Maud might be induced to make one of the party. Meredith and I should think ourselves the happiest of fellows if we could enjoy our sports and home at the same time. Why have you given up an idea which so smiled upon us all?'

'Because I saw that it wore no smiling aspect for Lady Maud, and even if I could I should not like to tease her into coming for my sake. Of course I should prefer to go

with you, but as you don't choose to take me alone, the best thing I can do is to accept Clotilde's invitation. It would be far more pleasant than going to stay with any of our new friends in England without you.'

There was something in the sound of Mildred's voice unlike its usual softness, and Charles looked anxiously at her.

'Why, Milly, what do you suppose this fishing-tour can be to me in comparison to your enjoyment? I only half consented to go because Meredith pressed it so much, and, besides my personal regard for him, I feel that I can never do enough for him who was so nobly kind to my sister in her greatest need. But he is the last person in the world who would wish to make your summer dull; therefore we will think no more of Ireland, and you and I will take a trip to

our native land, the Highlands, and finish the summer by making acquaintance with this charming English country life of which one has heard so much. Will not that programme do? . . . I remember in the old days how you used to long to see the Highlands.'

'Lead us not into temptation!' exclaimed Mildred, placing her hands upon her brother's arm, but turning away her head. 'You would spoil me and make me the most selfish little wretch in the world! . . . But I am not going to be wicked enough to yield to the temptation this time, although you have taken care to render it very enticing. The trip to the Highlands will be a pleasure to come, and, for this year I am going to Clotilde and you are going to Ireland. I like to think that you can help

me to repay a little of my debt to the Merediths.' . . .

During the course of the day Alfred called and found Mildred alone in the drawing-room.

'The servant told me that Lindsay was out,' Alfred said, as he shook hands with Mildred. 'I thought I was sure to catch him at this time, it is not more than half-past two.'

'He went out early this morning to meet a friend at the Kensington Museum, but he will certainly return before three o'clock; he desired me to ask you to wait for him, as he thought it likely you would come to-day. . . . Why did you not bring Eddy? You know he would have been quite satisfied to stay with me whilst you and Charles were out?'

'Satisfied, indeed! Why the child plagues

me to bring him here whenever he sees me put on my hat. But it is not fair that he should monopolise you altogether; I hoped you would come out to ride with your brother and me this afternoon, it is such a lovely day. . . Maud is gone with Joseph to hear some readings.'

'I shall be delighted to ride, and all the more as I shall not have much more riding this summer. I am going on Monday for a long visit to an old schoolfellow who was married a few weeks ago, and is now the chatelaine of a picturesqne old château in Brittany.'

'And your brother goes —'

'With you to Ireland,' interrupted Mildred; laughing as she added, 'Well, what have I done that you should look so indignant?'

'You knew, or should have known, that I did not desire Lindsay to come with me if his coming were to take him away from you. I pressed it because I was sure that he would yield at least to the pleading of his own wishes and yours, and let you come also. It is such nonsense to make a point of having a lady chaperon for you, as if a brother were not enough; as for Maud, how could you fancy that she would join a roughing expedition of that kind? . . . Is there not enough of wearisome inevitable form and restraint in the world without creating more?'

'*I* certainly think so; and I am afraid I should not be very submissive to any such forms, unless, as in the present case, they could not be broken without giving pain to someone whom I like very much. . . It is all settled. I am going to Dinant.'

'Then your brother must go with you. I could not think of allowing him to come with me.'

'Poor Charles! What a dull summer he will spend then, all alone here. He has not been invited by Madame de Bertrand, and his English intimate friend, it appears, does not any longer wish for his society. . . . Poor Charles!'

'I do believe that you have plotted all this in order to get rid of us both,' exclaimed Alfred, walking towards the window, half-vexed, yet smiling in spite of himself, at her assumed commiseration for Charles. 'You know perfectly well that the great pleasure of this trip to Ireland would be spoiled for me if I go without your brother, and it is spoiled for me now in *any* case, because I shall feel that it has driven you away to

those foreigners, who will probably keep you with them altogether. The next news I shall expect to hear is, that you are going to marry some dandified French Comte.'

'There is no danger of that. I shall never marry a Frenchman!'

The steadfast determination expressed in the tone of Mildred's voice, more than in the words themselves, made Alfred look round quickly at her. . . . Had she, then, taken a fancy to some Englishman? Strange to say this supposition pleased him quite as little as the other. . . .

The door opened, and Charles Lindsay entered.

CHAPTER XX.

An imagined absurdity may sometimes best illustrate a real wrongness.—THOMAS LYNCH.

As soon as Charles Lindsay returned, after escorting his sister as far as Rennes, he and Alfred set out on their tour, and Maud went back to Chiltern Park, where a select party of friends were shortly to join her.

Lord Waters was going abroad, but as he did not intend to be absent more than six weeks, he obtained from Alfred a promise that he would not leave Ireland until he should have come home; meanwhile he begged them to make Maurpton Castle their head-quarters. Accordingly, from Dublin they

went there direct, and the joy of the people on seeing Captain Meredith was so exuberant that Charles Lindsay declared, as they sat together drinking their wine after dinner, that if he were the proprietor, he should be tempted to feel jealous at such a reception given to another, and one not even a countryman.

'Well, but as they would say themselves, they look upon me "as almost all as one as an Irishman." My mother was Irish, and my home up to the age of seventeen was here. I am not sure even now it does not feel more like home to me than any other place; here I knew only what it was to be the constant object of care and affection to simple loving hearts. How different it is when we come to the realities of life! How many fair dreams are dispelled, and it is perhaps well for

us if the time never comes when—but too late —we see that they could have been realised! Pshaw! I hate reflection, that's the reason I am sure that Waters can never induce me to remain here for more than a few days at a time, although I love the place. It makes me think of the past and the future, yet it is folly ever to occupy oneself about any time but the present. Come, it is a lovely night, let me show you the lake, and perhaps we may find hovering about my particular crony the boat-keeper, assistant groom, wood-ranger, Jack of all trades—in short, Micky Clarke.' . . . Alfred stood up, humming as he left the room —

Il segreto per esser felice.

Mildred had never spoken to her brother about the Merediths' private life, the inadvertent word uttered in a moment of sorrow

and vexation on hearing him refer to Lady Maud's faith as something higher than that of their mother, was the only expression of anything like censure regarding Maud that had escaped her. But from what Charles had himself seen and heard, he knew that the Merediths were not a very united couple, yet he had never before heard Alfred allude, even vaguely, to his own great disappointment, and had no idea that the wound had pierced so deeply—that it had only been carefully plaistered over, without ceasing to rankle. Thus, after three months of intimate acquaintance, he discovered all that his sister had seen at a glance; she had felt it, he had learned it by degrees, and perhaps, had he not made that visit to Maurpton Castle, both the strength and the weakness of his friend's character would never have been fully re-

vealed to him: the strength to hide all evidence of his suffering so completely, yet without growing hard or cynical, and the sensitive weakness of shrinking from reflection, from looking the evil steadily in the face and striving to cure it.

'Where is the lake?' asked Charles, after they had walked in silence for some minutes.

'Right in front of the house,' replied Alfred absently.

'Please to remember that as yet I can understand nothing but plain English, I am not "all as one as an Irishman," if I were no doubt I should understand what you mean by saying that the lake is right in front of the house, although from the windows I could see nothing but an immense extent of unbroken lawn, skirted by a wood, and behind which there seems to rise yet other woods as if

crowning a ridge of hills, for the trees are far higher than those in the foreground.'

'Exactly so, but, owing to the plantations and the distance from the house, you could not see the great chasm which divides the lawn from the woods beyond, in its bed lies the lake, as in a framework of hills. There is an opening only at one end, and to approach it from any other side one must scramble down steep places covered with thickets and brambles, the only paths through them are formed by the winter rills. I assure you it is a scene strangely wild and picturesque in the midst of a private demesne.'

A sudden turn in the walk brought them in front of the opening so described; there was no moonlight, and the deeply-tinted sky, in which a solitary star distantly glimmered, added to the lonely beauty of the scene.

Close to the edge of the water, which rippled up in tiny eddies upon the soft soil, knelt a a man, apparently looking for something. Charles pointed to him, and laid his hand on Alfred's arm.

'It is only Micky Clarke,' whispered Alfred; 'let us stand a little apart under the trees, and see if he will recognise me in the dusk.'

Alfred trod heavily on purpose, and the sound caused Micky to jump up. For a moment he stood still, whilst his keen eyes seemed to pierce the darkness, then without the slightest hesitation he advanced to where Alfred stood and pulled off his battered hat.

'God save you Captain, but it's myself as is plased to welcome you back to the ould place. . . As soon as I h'ard you was come I wint up to the castle, but it was half-past seven

an' more, and dinner was just sarved, an' so I said I'd not disturb yer honour to-night, but be up betimes in the mornin' to pay me respects. . . I hope I see you well, Captain!'

'Of course yo do, Micky; don't you think that meeting again such old friends as yourself would make me well even if I had been ailing!'

'Ah thin, now, Captain Meredith, it's yerself that always know'd how to put the come hither upon one. . . I hope you left her Ladyship in good health, an' God help her!'

'Yes, in excellent health, and she sent you her kindest remembrances; but here is a great friend of ours come with me to make your acquaintance, and see for himself if you Irish are as great a people as you pretend. I told Mr. Lindsay that, as my friend, you would receive him like a prince, Micky.'

'Ah that I would, if I could; sure you know that all I can offer his honour is a kindly welcome to ould Ireland, and may our own St. Patrick guide his steps wherever he goes!'

'Thank you, Micky, for so good a wish,' said Charles; 'and now, will you tell me if among the privileges obtained for you by the great saint was the power of seeing in the dark?'

'I never h'ard tell on it, yer honour,' answered Micky, as gravely as if he had been asked the most solemn of questions.

'Well, then, how did you distinguish just now which of us was Captain Meredith? It was quite dark where we stood under the trees yonder, and you could not have seen our features.'

'Thrue for ye, sir; but sure, wouldn't I know *his* breath at midnight?'

'Well, Micky, Mr. Lindsay will now learn from experience one of the many things that the saint did invent for your special use, I mean the blarney,' said Alfred advancing towards the lake; but the tone of his voice showed, in spite of his light words, that the answer had touched him more than he was willing to let them see.

'At your old work, I perceive,' he added as he reached the spot where Micky had been kneeling, and saw there an open tin box half-full of a particular kind of worm, 'gathering a supply of that wonderful bait which you will believe can be caught better at night-time than in the day. Catch a good supply, for Mr. Lindsay and I shall set out on a fishing expedition in a day or two, and visit the better part of Ireland before we come back. Lord Waters said we might ask

you to give us the aid of your valuable services. Will you come with us, Micky? Remember you are not to do so unless you really like it yourself.'

'Why thin, doesn't yer honour know that I am ready to dance for joy an' pride at the thought of goin' travellin' wid two gintlemen like yerselves, let alone all the powerful big fish we'll catch? May be we won't t'ach his honour from the other side of the water how to catch a salmon!'

'Perhaps he may teach us, Micky. But at least, I think we shall be quick pupils. . . . And now, will you row us round the lake whilst we smoke our cigars?'

The boat was soon ready, and before the gentlemen wished Micky good-night, he had made himself master of the purposed plan of their wanderings. . . . They started on a

Thursday, and on the following day, when Micky discovered that Mr. Lindsay was as faithful a disciple of St. Patrick as himself, he felt it right to testify his joy by drinking a double allowance of whisky, and was so tipsy in the afternoon that Alfred had no little trouble to keep him from walking straight into the river after a fish which had broken his line and carried off the top joint of his fishing-rod.

'I wonder you are not ashamed to come near us,' Alfred said on the following morning, trying to look very stern, when they found Micky as usual at the edge of the stream and about to prepare their fishing-tackle; 'surely you might be satisfied by indulging in an extra glass now and then in the evening, without disgracing yourself and me before Mr. Lindsay by getting drunk at

mid-day! I have a great mind to send you back at once as you so well deserve.'

'Faix, Capt'in, I wouldn't believe that you would be so hard on a poor man for being a little overtaken by joy at hearin' that Mr. Lindsay—as he tould me himself whin he ordered that no rashers should be dressed for his breakfast—was brought into the thrue faith by a holy father and an Irishman, more power to him! out away in Australia. For Mr. Lindsay's sake, thin, you'll have to forgive this time, sir, for it was all along of his honour's convarsion, and I'll not taste a dhrop at all, till—'

'Till the next time, eh Micky? But if I catch you at it, back you'll go in disgrace. A pretty way, indeed, to celebrate Mr. Lindsay's convarsion! Do you suppose that he himself got tipsy with—with *joy* on that occasion?'

'No, your honour: the joy wouldn't do it *alone*, and Mr. Lindsay wasn't an Irish boy, and 'twas for *us* especially that St. Patrick invented the dhrop. You know the song, sir:—

No wonder that us Irish boys should be so gay and frisky,
It was St. Patrick first taught us the knack of drinking whisky;
Twas he that brew'd the best of malt and understood distillin',
His mother kept a shebeen house in the town of Enniskillen.

'Twas St. Patrick that invented the whisky, and made it so temptin' to us all out entirely!'

'But, Micky, I'm told you like to say that Captain Meredith is more than half Irish,' said Charles; 'his mother was a country-woman of yours, and he was brought up among you; but he does not get drunk by way of testifying his gladness whenever he hears good news, and as you did, offend God instead of thanking Him! Yet the whisky

should be as tempting to him as to you, according to your own showing.'

'By no manner o' m'ans, yer honour! Sure you know very well that the Ould Boy would'nt be wastin' his time a temptin' the Capt'in, an' God bless him!'

'Why not, Micky?' laughed Alfred. 'Do you suppose that he would so greatly prefer you to me as a perpetual guest at his fireside?'

'No Captain, sure I know well he would'nt be sich a fool as to pay more attention to me if he had an equal chance of us, but he knows that yer honour hasn't yet got the faith that l'ades away from him, and why thin would he be throublin' himself to tempt you whin he sees that you're comin' fair an' easy along the broad road, tho' pl'ase God it won't be always so!'

'I declare you are the most impertinent rascal that ever lived,' exclaimed Alfred hotly, half angry and half amused by the fellow's quickness, and Lindsay's unsuccessful efforts to restrain his laughter. 'I have spoiled you by allowing you to chatter in this way; and treating you as I do, it makes you disrespectful. . . . I see I must turn over a new leaf with you.'

By the time Alfred had got to the end of his reprimand the sense of amusement had so overpowered all feeling of anger, that he felt he should laugh if either Micky or Lindsay could succeed in catching his eye, and he pretended to be intently occupied in throwing out his line.

'Disrespectful, Captain? God forgive you for saying sich a thing! Your honour was long enough among us to be sinsible

that it's only to them we love and respect that we spake from our hearts, or without thinking but to have a laugh. Don't you know that even if only one of us two was to be sittin' up above for ever with our blessed Lady and all the court of heaven, and that I had the choosin' which it should be, I'd tell Ould Nick this minit to take me an' l'ave you for it? It would be the sorrowful day thin for me, Captain, whin you'd become different from what you always was towards me since you was no bigger than me knee. I set more store by you than even by our young lord himself. An' more, it would'nt be like you to doubt the love and gratitude of a poor man who has no interest in offerin' them to you, nor yet the m'ans to prove them, save by his prayers for you which are only known to God.'

'Well, I hope it would *not* be like me, Micky, and I shall not doubt you even tho' you do let your tongue run too fast sometimes,' said Alfred, turning to him with a smile; 'so we are friends again, and I'll forget that I was to become stern and severe if you will only behave like a rational creature during the rest of our "travels," as you call it.'

'Oh thin, good luck attind you, Captain. It's the happy man agin you've made me, and I'd bite out me tongue sooner than offind you, tho' praise be to God an' his holy mother, it goes hard with your honour to take offince with anythin' said for a bit o' divarshun, bekase it's yerself that's too quick not to see the fun of it: but anyhow I'll be as sober and grave as a judge until we get back to the Castle.'

Micky kept his promise pretty fairly; that is, he never got so tipsy again as to walk into the water after rebellious fish, but his love of 'divarshun' remained unsubdued, and to his antics and 'chaff' Alfred and his friend owed many merry hours. . . .

CHAPTER XXI.

The soul that loves can dare all things.—Lord LYTTON.

THEY had reserved the North for the close of their tour, which had lasted about four weeks, when they arrived at the village of C——, situated upon the line of coast between Belfast and the Giant's Causeway. The grand rugged beauty of the scenery especially delighted Charles Lindsay, and on the morning after their arrival he said he should like to sail round the frowning headland that jutted out so boldly into the sea, terminating in a sharply-peaked crag. There was some difficulty, however, in

finding a boat or anyone to man it, as all the able hands had gone out on the previous evening with the little fishing-fleet, and were not expected back before sunset at earliest.

A fresh breeze was blowing and Alfred was a bad sailor, he tried therefore to dissuade Charles from his project, especially as they could only obtain an inexperienced youth as their pilot. Charles, however, persisted in declaring that it was just the right sort of weather for such an excursion, and, as they were to leave C—— early on the next morning he could not afford to lose the day, but he begged Alfred to remain on shore—'the misery of sea-sickness is not a thing,' he said, 'to be lightly accepted, and under the pretext of enjoyment.'

Micky had no fancy either for being, as he said himself, tossed about by the powerful

big waves, and so he remained to keep the Captain company. . . . The breeze had risen steadily during the afternoon, and when, about five o'clock, Alfred walked up to the Rocky Point—as the headland was called—to look out for Charles, the view from the cliff was most grand. The expanse of water, stretching out in a vast sheet of white foam until it met the distant horizon, seemed to mingle with the many-coloured tints of the reddening sky, and, as the spray of the waves rose high above the peaks, glistening in the sun's rays, it seemed like a silvery cloud suspended in mid-air, all along the line of rock-bound coast.

For a few minutes Alfred was dazzled, and unconscious of all save the wild beauty of the scene, but as his eyes became more accustomed to the glitter he saw a boat rounding

the Point. The old people of the village had calmed his rising fears by assuring him that there was no danger; that they did not consider the gale then blowing a storm, and said that the only precaution necessary to be taken by those at sea was to keep far out, so as not to run the risk of striking against some of the rocks which could not always be seen at high tide.

It seemed to Alfred that the boat, which he had recognised as his friend's, was not keeping out sufficiently, and the keenest anxiety took possession of him. The lad at the helm appeared to be aware that they had got too close, for he was evidently striving with all his strength to steer further out, but he had made a great mistake in turning the Point so sharply, and the force of the waves was too great to allow the boat to follow the

seaward course that he was then trying to make. Nevertheless they advanced steadily, and Charles waved his handkerchief to Alfred as they passed; in another minute the cliff would be fairly rounded, and then, Alfred hoped, all cause for apprehension would be virtually over. Just as the turning hid them from his sight, however, a harsh grating sound struck upon his ear, and with a loud shout, which he hoped might be heard by some of the villagers, he dashed down the zig-zag path that led to the near side of the Point.

The boat had struck upon one of the crags and had fairly split in two. 'Leap out into the sea, your honour,' cried the boy; 'front the waves for a bit, and if we can keep away from the rocks we shall be safe yet.'

Alfred reached the shore in time to see them thus forced to cast themselves adrift.

It seemed as if an icy weight had fallen upon his heart, and the name of Mildred sprang to his lips.

'Run, its for their lives—bring ropes and help!' he said to Micky, who had heard his shout, and was by his side.

'Lord love you, Captain,' exclaimed Micky, as Alfred proceeded to pull off his hat and coat;' is it going after him you are? Don't you know that Mr. Lindsay is a better swimmer even than yourself, an' you'll only be making bad worse? For the love o' God stay where ye are, and let 'em see that help is commin' whilst I run for it!'

'Yes, you are right; but go—no, stay an instant, he is hurt; if we are both lost tell Lord Waters to break it to Miss Lindsay, and say that I tried to save her brother—and now in heaven's name go quickly! . . .'

Micky dashed off at full speed, not daring to make any further remonstrance, for he also had seen that Charles Lindsay suddenly ceased to swim, and had grasped at the broken boat which floated near him. Alfred threw himself into the surging sea, moved with the strength of desperate resolution; he was battling with the waves for more than the preservation of a dear friend, for the power to save from overwhelming sorrow her whom in that hour he knew to be dearer to him than all the world besides. . . .

In springing from the wreck Charles had struck his left shoulder against a piece of rock, and the pain caused by the blow was so great that after the first few strokes he lost all strength in his arm and kept afloat only by clinging with the right hand to the planks he had seized upon; but even that stay was

slipping from him, and he had nearly become unconscious, when he was roused by the strong grasp of a human hand.

With a thrill of joy Alfred felt that, now at least, Mildred's brother would be saved, or they would perish together. At length a shout told him that help was at hand. . . An old fisherman with careful aim soon threw a coil of rope to him, at the end of which there was a running loop.

Alfred caught it, and fortunately succeeded in casting the loop over the shoulders of Charles; it was at once tightened from the shore, and Alfred kept on the side towards the rocks, trying to help his poor friend from being dashed against the shore; but his own strength began to fail as they neared the lowest ledge of rocks where many eager hands were stretched forth waiting to grasp them; a heavy

wave broke his hold of the rope, and he sank back as Charles was safely landed . . . Alfred's last thought as his eyes closed in expectation of death was one almost of exultation: 'Henceforth I shall always live in her heart and yet be no cause of sorrow to her!' . . . .

But it was not so ordained—the next advancing wave washed him back, and into the arms of a lad who brought him up safe to land.

CHAPTER XXII.

> There was a flash
> Of gladness in her eyes, and in her thanks
> A subtler charm than that of gratitude.
>
> DR. HOLLAND, *Katrina.*

CHARLES'S letter giving the account of his preservation from a watery grave was a thrice-welcomed messenger to his sister. The few short words—short because they said so much—in which he spoke of Alfred's courage and devotedness found a quick echo in her heart, from which an uneasy sense of restraint seemed all at once to be removed. Formerly she found it difficult to assign even to herself any ostensible reason for feeling so much more ardently grateful to him than to

Lady Maud; but now her brother's life was a present from him, and she felt that the giver of such a gift could never be too highly prized by her. Charles little thought that his was to be the hand to break down the last fence that had guarded her heart from becoming a prey to one of those strong attachments which often absorb a lifetime.

In order to console the Meredith children, when Mildred was about to leave them, they had been given a promise that she should come again on a visit after the London season; and accordingly it was arranged that on the return of the tourists from Ireland she should meet them in town and accompany them to Chiltern Park. On arriving at the Euston Square terminus Charles proposed that Alfred should go with him at once to their house, as 'Milly,' he said, 'would be

disappointed if she did not see the hero of their trip as well as his prize.' Alfred laughingly disclaimed any right to the title of hero, but made no objection to Charles's proposal; he could not deny himself the pleasure of witnessing the joy that, as he knew, would light up Mildred's soft eyes at the first sight of her dear brother who had been so nearly lost to her.

To witness her delight would be his greatest reward, and he resolved that no whispering of prudence should mar his enjoyment of it or of the few happy weeks that would follow when her presence should once again brighten his home—to snatch a last draught of happiness and then to pursue his lonely journey away from the grove and the fountain which had so unexpectedly sprung up in his path through the desert of life.

They found two young Irish friends of Lady Maud's—the Misses Cunningham—at Chiltern Park. Lord Waters and Joseph joined them some days later, so that they made a merry party of eight, each finding companionship well suited to his or her particular tastes. The children appeared to look upon Mildred as their especial property and playmate, and clamorous calls for her generally announced the hour of their liberation from the schoolroom. It happened also that their games or excursions rarely ended without a visit from papa, to increase the joyousness of their little circle; and when that month was passed and Mildred had gone away, and papa was not much at home, they reverted to it as a time of fabled delights.

Joseph's satisfaction at all he saw rendered him particularly agreeable, and Maud was

doubly pleased that he should single her out before the others as possessing the mind most capable of appreciating his talents. For the first time, however, he fancied that she showed a little jealousy of Mildred, but rather in regard to her children than her husband. If Maud really loved anyone it was her son, yet with her he seemed a shy, proud child, restive under the slightest correction and simply passive when in favour; whilst his vehement affection for Mildred had become a subject of jest, and he was generally spoken of as her little lover. That child, Joseph felt, was likely to be the greatest obstacle in his way, and he was therefore delighted to see anything that might detach Maud from him, such as his undisguised preference for another.

Most of the party were too much occupied

with their own hopes and feelings—except the Misses Cunningham, whom envy rendered keen-sighted—to observe that Lord Waters was getting entangled in the web of Mildred's fascinations. Had he married some years before, personal attractions would hardly have had much to do with his choice of a wife, he would rather have sought a connection tending to further his political views; but a gradual change had long been working in him, disgust at the fruits produced by the agitations of his own party had detached him very much from his former doctrines, and love, finding his heart less occupied than of old with thoughts of resentment and violence, crept gently in and dwelt there . . . Meanwhile came the time of separation and all were unfeignedly sorry, but to Alfred it caused more than regret—the others might

meet again and enjoy like pleasures, it was his farewell to a season of happiness; he had played with the fire as long as he could do so without injuring others as well as himself, and henceforth he was resolved to avoid Mildred. . . .

'You will come to stay with us now and then before the season begins, I hope,' said Lindsay, on the eve of their departure as he and Alfred lingered in the smoking-room; 'it will be a change for you, and London is not unbearable even in winter, if we had but those with us whom we really like and who strive to make it pleasant to us.'

'I don't think that any place in the world would be dull under such circumstances, it would not be so to me at least!'

'Then you promise to come?'

'No,—I can't.'

Alfred pushed away his chair and began to stir the fire.

'Why, what do you mean? Surely you are free to come if you like!'

'Is one ever free to do what one likes? . . . The fact is I have forsworn London. I don't think I shall ever go there again to remain for a long time, even when my household migrates thither for the season. I am tired of England. There is some idea that Waters may be sent on a foreign mission next spring and probably I shall go with him, and spend the next year among the snows of Russia.'

'Nonsense, Meredith, you have got a sudden attack of the "blue-devils" to talk of going to Russia—you, a *pater-familias*, a large landed proprietor!'

'Is that my fault?' I wish to heaven my dear old uncle had left Chiltern Park and all its riches to Joseph, it is but a burden to me. I don't mean to say that I was always wise enough not to wish for wealth, but I have learned its real value. I am quite serious then in talking of going with Waters. I can't ask you to join us as I should like to do, because you have so dear a tie to keep you here, but when I return, your sister'—here he gave the fire a fierce thrust—'your sister will no doubt be married; then you and I can have some more wandering together: and perhaps the second time we may succeed in drowning ourselves, and Micky will sing a dirge over us, and say a *De profundis* for you, and for me also, I suspect, in spite of my being a heretic. Having given you so salutary a subject for

meditation I shall leave you to work it out, and betake myself to bed.'

'No, Meredith, don't go. It is in your sad moments such as these—and it grieves me to think how great must be your sadness when it pierces even through your natural light-heartedness—that you should give me the right of a friend to remain with you, and try to cheer, even if I may not know the cause of your depression. I would give worlds, if I had them, to see you happier!'

'I know you would! You cannot help me now, however; some day, perhaps, I may tell you all, and then you will see that I am less foolish than you now think me to be. The greatest pleasure I could enjoy would be in accepting your invitation—in being with you, but I have told you that for the present I have forsworn London, and, believe me,

the best thing I can do is to go with Waters. Do not then make it more difficult for me than it already is, by tempting me any further to follow a different and a more pleasant course. Let us say no more on the subject, and, and good night, old fellow . . .' He pressed his friend's hand and hurried away.

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